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THE UNCELESTIAL CITY

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The UNCELESTIAL CITY

By

HUMBERT WOLFE

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In the course of writing this book a number of isolated poems have appeared in numerous periodicals. Thanks for permission to republish are due to *The Spectator*, *The Saturday Review*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *The Argosy*, *Time and Tide*, *The Bermondsey Book*, *Country Life*, *The Week-end Review*, and *Punch*. One of the poems in Book II. and portions of the poem in the blasphemy trial, and of that dealing with the charwoman's death, have appeared previously in *The Silver Cat*. The "Tail-Piece" first appeared in *The Legion Book*, and a poem out of "Retort by Mrs. Jakes" was first printed as a Poetry Bookshop Christmas Card. The poem "Bells in the Strand" first appeared in *A Christmas Anthology*, while Peter Arkwright's speech was published in the Paris quarterly *This Quarter*.

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Dedication
to
" My Visitor "
who gave me
" Requiem."

" With shame—and yet when other poets offer
the Tuscan wreath of rose and bay and vine
—a long Italian summer—you will suffer
also, I think, this bitter wreath of mine."

Bitter indeed of nettles and of thorn,
and cold as winter, yet because I wove it,
because of the sorrows whereof it was born
that we have shared (and are sharing) you will have it,

and lay it to your heart, wherein it had sprung
of all those tears, and of the bitterness
that you had not endured, nor I had sung,
nor we outpaced together, had we loved less.

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PROEM

Argument

The late Mr. Justice Crayfish finds himself ascending a flight of steps leading to a gate. He recognises the gatekeeper as one whom he has known and loved once. He is doubtful whether he will not awake in the world he has known, but, seeing a City beyond the gate, asks the gatekeeper to let him through so that he may visit the City. The gatekeeper assures him that the way to the farther City lies backward through the streets of the City that the judge has just left. But the gatekeeper—who professes himself a fiddler by trade—will play the tune of entering, and will accompany the judge on his long pilgrimage. He plays the tune, and the judge retraces his steps through his life.

PROEM

Casually, as though he were stepping into his club,
the judge walked up the broad steps, and stood at the gate.
If there were drums, he did not hear them rub ;
if trumpets sounding, he had come too late.

He was thinking of some unimportant thing—
some business left undone, a cancelled meeting.
If there were voices, they were but whispering ;
if called by anyone, he heard no greeting.

His eyes, as always, had a look half blinded,
half of astonishment, as though he were
seeking not what eyes sought, but what the mind did,
and it was thus he saw the gatekeeper.

This was a man he knew or whom he had seen once,
either in youth or when life had played its ace,
and his heart had become what all hearts have been once—
in such a time as that, at such a place.

" I shall wake presently," he thought, " at daylight.
It is the season of larks. They will be flinging
the bright seed of song in the furrows of grey light,
till the East is gold with the smooth sheaves of singing.

I shall lean out in the fresh dawn, rising
out of grey dream in the green world as ever
familiar, beloved, intimate, surprising,
and go down to the water-lilies in the quiet river.

My lips with the rain may be wet as a bough slips
her burthen under the blossom's starry thrust,
and my foot with the dew that has fretted the cowslips
with the fleeting erosion of silver rust.

Out of this darkness," he thought, " I shall wake,
and see in my mirror, when the curtain is drawn,
behind these phantoms the blossoms shake,
beyond these shadows the arrogant dawn.

There is no moon here. But I shall awaken
by the birches whose leaves are wet with her.
Surely, and surely the sun on the bracken."
" Why ! surely," answered the gatekeeper.

" But you, gatekeeper," said he, " why do you dally
at the lock ? Unfasten quickly, and let me enter !
That is the City I seek—beyond the valley,
with the silhouette of spring in life's midwinter."

" Aye, you shall enter," he said. " But turn your face !
The path lies backwards." " I came thence but lately."
" And therefore return ; and as your feet retrace
the path, endure your own declension greatly.

Then you shall enter at last by your own path,
treading the streets only your footsteps trod,
till under the dark eyelashes of death
you suddenly look into the eyes of God.

Mine is only to play the song of entering
gate-music that alarms the posted wardens
against the stranger. 'Tis a song they sing
especially outside abandoned gardens.

It is an old tune. Some wild fellow made it,
plucking it note by note with a crooked finger,
and listened half astonished, as he played it,
to rhythms that betrayed an earlier singer.

Complaints unsatisfied—but not his sorrow,
rapture that foundered upon alien tears,
as though he gradually shaped an arrow
to fit a bow for hands in other years.

I am a fiddler by trade, and when I play it
the gates will swing. Go bravely in, and tread
the City of your utmost vision, and pray it
may not be found a City of the Dead."

Draw back the bolt ; swing the gate ;
  it is evening. How
shall you refuse the traveller,
  gate-warden, now ?

He brings nothing with him
  but a shadowy burden
that will mix with the darker
  shade of your garden.

He walked with love once.
  It is evening. Let him
pass where all knew love,
  and all forget him.

He has built castles ;
  they have fallen. Thou
shalt let him rebuild them
  of shadow now.

He dreamed, he desired.
  Give him the wage
of silence
  after pilgrimage.

He has brought his sorrow,
  his failure, his sin.
And therefore let him
  enter in.

BOOK I

APPROACH TO THE CITY

Argument

On the way to the Uncelestial City of his life the fiddler reminds the judge of his early devotion to verse. He then discovers John's father discussing with his conscience whether the boy should go into the Blackford trade or choose Oxford and a professional career. Conscience is successful in urging the choice of Oxford.

At Oxford, John Crayfish is first discovered debating materialism with his college friend, Peter Arkwright, in the J.C.R. Arkwright urges that men, descended from the apes, discredit their origin and yet have the audacity to claim a spiritual origin. To which Crayfish retorts that the ape in man, by being the source of eternal conflict, is his passport to the angel. Later, Arkwright and Crayfish discuss the future over the fire, Arkwright maintaining a steadily cynical and Crayfish a consistently idealist view. Finally, after having rejected journalism, politics, the Civil Service, teaching, and business, Crayfish plumps for the law. He is accused by Arkwright of choosing it as a means of getting married and not on merits. Crayfish defends his right to choose law on both grounds. Farewell to Oxford and youth.

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THE FIDDLER

By a bleak hill, in a dark hollow,
lured by some high Olympic fad,
one winter evening Apollo
came on another singing lad.

And since in youth there is no danger
in conversation with a god,
the boy received the golden stranger
encouragingly with a nod.

Apollo waited unastonished,
while merely by his neighbourhood
the sprawling town beneath him vanished
into the twilight of his mood.

The path across the ruined valley
ran straight for Troy, as though it were
a way that followed naturally
mill-chimney and gasometer,

as though the villas weakly scrambling,
and slums that had no mind at all,
swayed in the dusk like Paris trembling
when Helen walked upon the wall.

The crumpled streets stretched out and onwards
to goals unknown, but sure no less
that there was waiting somewhere sunwards
a rendezvous with loveliness.

Mill-chimneys took the wind like steeples,
the steeples rang so high an air
you'd think that all the feathered peoples
surged upwards in a single prayer,

a single chord, so far transcending
all that was ever sung or spoken,
that lest by the predestined ending
the heart should be for ever shaken,

Apollo with immortal logic,
lucid, abominable, kind,
preserved the vision with the magic
touch on the eyes that left them blind.

I

MR. CRAYFISH DISCUSSES HIS SON'S FUTURE WITH HIS CONSCIENCE

Mr. Emmanuel Crayfish maintains,
" Start a house with laying the drains."
(And start a life, with a hook the way fish
are drawn by the nose, Emmanuel Crayfish !)

" I never learned nothing but rule of three,
and well," says Emmanuel, " look at me !
Oxford for snobs is all very well
but——" (Perfectly right, Emmanuel.

Oxford will make him the sort of snob
who will never hold down a regular job,
but who hears beyond hooters and factory bells
something further, something else.)

" I don't say, mind you, he isn't a match
for Eton and Harrow trash and such.
But some day he'll have to buy and sell."
(Perfectly right, Emmanuel !

" In the City
they sell and buy,
and nobody ever
asks them why.

But since it contents them
to buy and sell,
God forgive them !
They might as well.")

" He thinks," Emmanuel Crayfish groans,
" there's things you can't hear on telephones ;
well, what if there are ? A pretty thing
if all of us went woolgathering."

(Gathering wool [you are right, as always]
the worst of the foolish, the shameful, the small
ways
of creeping out, through a tunnel of trees,
to an island beyond the Cyclades,

creeping out, creeping on
to Camelot, to Babylon,
beyond the dust, the storm, the heat,
and far beyond Threadneedle Street,

saying :

" When I walk down
Threadneedle Street
I hear the multi-
tudinous feet

of those who crawl
and limp and caper
for the love of a handful
of crumpled paper.
Let them find it, or
let them lose it.
All of them die before
learning to use it.")

" And," Crayfish says, " if I let him go
what's to become of him, I don't know.
He keeps on talking—why ! damn it all,
you might even call him a Radical !

And saying (I shouldn't wish it mentioned)
' Old working-men have the right to be pensioned '—
and the way he speaks of Blackford—well ! "
(Mr. Crayfish, intolerable !

Look for yourself at this gracious city—
gasometers too proud to be pretty,
and warehouses that seem to be
an argument for leprosy.

Very gallant—of brick and stones.
Very damn-your-eyes, one owns,
and yet out of the years, as out of a basket
[ask your heart, Emmanuel, ask it !]

where roses have been, and are no longer,
dead beauty lays a finger
on unsuspected fiddle-strings,
as, for example, when one sings :

" Do you know Blackford ? Nature keeps the tally
of those who found a smooth embosomed valley,
waiting for dawn among her hills, and splendid
with the shadow of her trees when day was ended,
who found this valley, and, being business-men,
swore that these things should not occur again.
They therefore added up a maze of brick
by some unspeakable arithmetic,
quietly boasting, as they clinched the sum,
God makes the country, but we make the slum.
Then where the dawn had slipped her hounds, and
hunted
her prey—the saffron mists—steam-engines shunted
trucks full of coal with creaks and groans and jams,
whole-heartedly supported by the trams
with screaming brakes that skidded up and down
the hills that make a nightmare of the town.
And where the night had hung her lamps that were
lit one by one by an old lamplighter,
who kindles with the moon and stars the black
and glamorous pavements of the Zodiac,
and where the valley—a dark and dreaming gipsy—
had worn the silver-tinselled moon, the tipsy
flames from the furnaces rose up and fell
like burning drunkards staggering in Hell.
What then ? For boyhood, all these things are lies
told by old men to mislead Paradise,

that only waits the pass-word to admit
the ancient secret to the young lord of it.
The maze of streets, plunging down Walton Hill,
swirl in an eddy about Stoneman's Mill,
whose chimney tops the skyline with a dark,
though self-contented, exclamation mark.
But here the slithering rows of cottages
check on their heels and stumble to their knees
this side of the canal, and quietly watch,
like cloth-capped convicts at a football match,
the struggle on the further side between
smoke—the grim bully—and the gallant green.
For here upon the hill nature has rallied
her desperate fields, and the last trees, though sullied,
keep their Athenian line, and battle on
in the green phalanx of their Marathon.
And here to see, or rather here to guess,
the old repeatable shapes of loveliness—
the stealing stream that glimmers in the mind
and leaves the throat of lucid water behind,
the wind across the moor, the curlew flying
slantingly between the two notes of her crying,
and how with her cold charm the moon surprises
the heart, and in the heart the great sun rises.")

" Sir," said Crayfish—his crossed hands most
unpleasantly, like buttered toast,
" I find life difficult enough,
without that stained-glass kind of stuff.

If I let him go to complete his letters
along with what think themselves his betters,
it won't be because he dislikes the view
of Coldingham Lane and a chimney or two.

It'll be to give him a chance to mix
with lads whose fathers run politics,
and other lads whose people are
County, big business, or Bar."

(Or even Crayfish, the Stock Exchange,
the gayest fellows with the widest range ;
some of them Jews, of course, but then
business men will be business men.

" Here's the mart
where all things change
into others
rich and strange.

The Bull goes grubbing
like a bear,
the latter sees red
everywhere.

And here the outside
broker can
outpoint the
Ethiopian

by buying black,
and with a slight
profit unloading it
as white.

While as regards the
leopard's spots,
they simply offer them
in lots

to the confiding
public, who
do what they're damn-well
told to do.")

" I'm not so sure of the Stock Exchange—
a little risky, a trifle strange—
but there's nothing," says Crayfish, " harms or
soils
body and soul in tops and noils.

Not that there's anything wonderful
(if you know what I mean) in handling wool,
but there's only one way I know to rob
Time of his pay-roll, and that's a job.

Games and girls and youth and friends
every one of them changes and ends,
and there's nothing new under the sun—
but every job means another one.

So that I'm worried to think of John
with nothing steady to pull him on,
and yet if he wants to go ——"
(He shall—
returning at nightfall a prodigal.

He will have herded with the divine
company of starry swine
that plunge their snouts into the trough
of something a little farther off.

He will have hearkened to the forlorn
echo of a swineherd's horn,
that indistinctly bids them race,
possessed by God, down a steep place.

And if he grows tired, with the dusk,
of finding ambrosia in the husk,
if at the end of all wayfarings
adventure is potato-parings,

if all things perilous and big
shrink in the little eye of a pig
to rubbish tumbled out to lie
in a dream-abandoned sty,

then half in craven terror, half
hungry for the fatted calf,
let him surrender altogether,
muttering, " I have sinned, my father.")

" Yes," said Mr. Crayfish, " but
suppose when he comes the door is shut,
suppose he puts it off too late,
and death is standing at the Gate ? "

(All of us have to sell and buy,
and nobody ever asks us why,
but since we have to buy and sell,
leave it at that, Emmanuel.

You will have done your best, and when
at evening he turns home again,
leave him to make his bargain, sir,
as all must, with the gatekeeper.

Let him go out, your prodigal son,
and when the parable has run
its ancient course of fear and sin
and glory, he will enter in.)

If I had money, as I have none,
I'd buy the City, and sell it for fun
to a little black pig, who a long time since
started life as a fairy prince.
And while the others were all for trough,
he was over the hills and a long way off
catching the moon, and letting a star go
that was caught in the top'sle rig of his Argo.
And he swore, as he sailed out with the tide,
he would see death's eyes on the other side.
And he steered for the sun, like a baby feeling
there must be some way up the wall to the ceiling,
and the stippled clouds in a long low frieze
were the fairy-tale of the Golden Fleece.
But alas ! gold apples, alas ! dream's high land !
there lies a green enchanted island,
where Circe claims the heart for hers
even of beauty's moonrakers.
And the fleece is lost, and the clouds are cold,
and there is no gold but fairy gold,
fairy gold that tumbles and splashes
into the water, dust and ashes.
And the deeper it plunges, the deeper they dig
this little pig, and that little pig.
" Grunt," says the first, and " Grunt," says his brother,
and each one gravely approves the other.
And as for the sty, it becomes, as they stir,
muddier and muddier.
But, it may be, Odysseus, that ancient wizard,
will catch my swine, and slit up his gizzard.
And the sty will blossom with olive and quince,
and the hog will be walking there straight as a prince.

II

SOME ADVANTAGES OF OXFORD

THE FIDDLER

The cedar stretches
  her shadow umber
almost to the beeches
  (do you remember ?).

The limes are angling
  for a moon that flinches
with their entangling
  night-sweet branches.

The tidal night
  with foamless surf
darkens the bright
  moon-painted turf,

soundlessly flooding,
  as though to pillage
the ancient brooding
  cliffs of the college,

till the ship's bell
  over a dim sea
of Balliol
  and Trinity

rings in the sleep-
unconscious brain
warningly, and
is still again.

I

DEBATE IN THE J.C.R.

A

MR. PETER ARKWRIGHT

I shall not, gentlemen, attempt to do
more than to hold a mirror up to you,
convinced that, seeing the reflected features
of what are certainly God's humblest creatures,
you will, if you possess an ounce of pride,
unanimously vote for suicide.
What are the facts ? Is it not commonplace
that the dim outline of the human face
is only a fleeting mask, behind which skulk
the myriad rats of time, that leave their hulk
age after age to huddle in the wet
darknesses of the heart's red oubliette.
These are our blood and bone that climb and crawl
up from the mire through the Neanderthal,
until they seem to slough their origin,
and change their nature when they change their skin.
" The isle is full of voices "—yes ! we know
whose by what magic conjured, Prospero,
but when they are hushed at evening, every man
deep in his inmost heart hears Caliban.

Bear with me, gentlemen, while I remind you
of the incessant molecules that bind you.
Observe creation mercifully hidden
either in an imaginary Eden,
or buried in some absent-minded spasm
of a self-generated protoplasm.

Or see how wisps of gas collect, congeal,
burn, and through space first shudderingly reel,
then, cooling, burst and crackle, like a dumpling,
now sweating into seas, in mountains crumpling,
with trees and grass, a vegetable mould
proof of corruption and the blood run cold.
And after this, like maggots or the weevil,
a million forms, but every one of evil,
crawl on the skin, destroying as they grow,
the failing source of life from which they flow,
till after feather, fin, and fur at last
in folly first, as in all else surpassed,
mankind appears, when time contrives to shape
a fallen angel from a risen ape.

Darwin—an eminent Victorian—
caused some alarm by noticing that man
was ape-like in his origins—a bungle
of fish and something hairy in a jungle.
Adam, this worthy proved, was not God's
flunkey
announcing Him in Eden, but a monkey.
A generation, quietly aware
of its own virtue, did not greatly care,
but left it to the bishops and the thinkers
to prove that God Himself made use of blinkers.
And not in vain. The Church advised the masses
to take the judgment of their looking-glasses.
Was it not plain that faces marred with labour,
each more distorted than its patient neighbour,
that bodies crippled in the holy task
of working any hours greed might ask,
and spirits learning from their native hovel
that poverty's whole duty is to grovel,

were such as must beyond all question prove
the operation of Immortal Love,
which in this withered flesh and twisted bone meant
to glorify vicarious atonement ?

Nor were the statesmen slow in Russian blood
to seal man's evangelic brotherhood,
and claim (with truth) that Inkerman had shown
that men content (in quarrels not their own)
to starve and perish in a frozen heap
descended not from monkeys, but from sheep.
Nor did the poets choose this time to be dumb,
but asked the world, as specialists in freedom,
if here where, broadening down, the thing became
everyone's property, and no one's aim,
the liberty of conscience and of thought
(the right, i.e., to think the things they ought)
were to be lost without a struggle, or
were they the fellows that they took them for,
pledged to the view that Englishmen were free
(if in naught else) to choose their family tree ?

Let other nations, German, French, and Turk,
listen to reason ! Britons would not shirk,
but, seeing Eden everywhere about them
(indeed, could Eden be conceived without them ?),
would plump for Adam, saying with quiet verve
men have the ancestors that they deserve.

MR. CRAYFISH

I do not know if anybody here
has been to Zweilutschinen. (What I want
to say in answer may at first, I fear,
seem, though it isn't, quite irrelevant.

And I'll go on and prove it.) You'll remember
(for no one who has seen forgets) the way
the pine-trees in their green battalions clamber,
like Hannibal's armies that Time has led astray.

" I demens ! "—still the Roman whisper scourges
the tree-enchanted Carthaginians,
and still the battle-line unbroken surges,
mad with the mountain-wind we call romance.

" I demens ! "—like the pine-trees unprevailing,
yet not for wind nor avalanche looking back,
or like the Roman legions quietly wheeling,
when Varrus heard the high buccina crack.

" I demens ! " idiot ! bear creation's standard
through savage Alpine heights, and learn, poor fool,
that, changing nothing, you have only pandered
to boys, and become a text-book for a school.

" I demens ! " idiot soul of man continue
between the snow and ice your hopeless quest,
finding at every corner death between you
and the land, where bloom the orange-trees of rest.

" I demens ! " fight, and fail, and, afterwards,
with the shrill laughter of the ape within you,
mocking the tarnished shields and broken swords,
and in the teeth of certain death, continue !

Continue ! knowing as the pine-trees know
that somewhere in the urgent sap there is
an everlasting answer to the snow,
and a retort to the last precipice,

that, merely by climbing, the shadow is made less,
that we have some engagement with a star
only to be honoured by death's bitterness,
and where the inaccessible godheads are,

that to plunge upwards is the way of the spark,
and that, burning up and out, even as we die
we challenge and dominate the shameless dark
with our gold death—and that is my reply.

II

OVER THE FIRE

"With all the world to choose from, what shall we choose,
you who believe in justice and in truth, and I
who believe that whatever word we may use,
the thing itself in the end is unjust and a lie.

You spoke, my dear old fool, as you can, with a sob
in your throat of failure as man's eternal redemption,
but I would have him merely get on with his job,
and not envisage his life on that doubtful assumption.

For if you take an exam, it will not help you
to plead that you wanted a fourth or something worse.
For they will merely proceed, dear John, to scalp you,
as is the way of life and examiners.

And in any case failure's the stuff to go to bed with,
when you are tired of spring, and afraid of dawn,
and it's the stuff that they embalm the dead with
when the lights are out, and the last blinds are drawn.

But not for us, John, not for you and for me
the cerecloths lapped round the face diminished,
and the old curator in the dim gallery
lecturing on all that beauty long since vanished.

Oh, no, not that, but the muscles taut of the eight
leaning on their oars at Iffley, and on the second
suddenly catching the water, and driving straight,
twenty-eight, thirty, to thirty-two quickened.

And so let us choose as they chose—and leave the mallow
and the grape-hyacinth of your mountain-valley,
and leave the snowfields of narcissus that follow
the mountain-crocuses, crisper than the lily.

Leave that, and let us choose, most obstinate
and antique dreamer, whatever less may please
than Periclean service to his dear State,
or than beauty moulded by Praxiteles.

Yes, let us choose, and mine be the first voice.
We will be poets—nay, but I insist !
And if that fail us, I've a second choice—
I'll live and die a British journalist.

You cannot hope
to bribe or twist,
thank God ! the
British journalist.

But, seeing what
the man will do
unbribed, there's
no occasion to."

" Stop ragging, Peter. We're not made for verse.
That needs a silence at the heart's core, unstirred
by any hope or thought save only hers
that has the sacred and unsealing word.

The world is too much with us, even here,
even in Oxford, where one might have imagined
there would be harbourage for the craft that steer
out of tumult into her matutinal legend.

But we are vexed with life, and we cannot wait
upon the acquaintance of wings. We must choose,
therefore,
some path, no matter what, so it be straight,
and have some bourne that the truth in us can care
for."

" But still I'll have a sense of humour, John,
and if we go cloud-walking, you and I,
the boot I'll wear will be a Wellington,
that keeps my feet, if not my powder, dry.

And so let's think (before we finally choose)
of journalism ! What the public needs
in literature is venomous reviews
of all the books that everybody reads,

along with friendly mention of the German,
French, Russian, Polish, Arabic, and Greek,
or anything that's duller than a sermon
and written in a language we can't speak.

And therefore will not be in competition
with anything the critic himself may pen,
beside exhibiting his erudition,
and a well-deserved contempt for Englishmen.

Or he could take to Nature-notes and scribble
inside reports upon the celandine,
modestly hinting that if he took the trouble
he could outpoint old Wordsworth in his own line,

saying :

'The primrose on
the river's brim
was one-and-six a
line to him.

And though he grumbled,
begged, and swore
(believe me) it was
nothing more.'

or :

'"Star and not song,
sweet bird, thy stave is,"
wrote Jobson, imi-
tating Davies.

" Eve heard you singing,
and rippled ' Hark,
God is amused ! Oh,
What a lark ! ' "

" And Adam answered,
' Eve, you've said it,'
but naturally
took the credit

of having been the
first who heard
all heaven laughing
in a bird."

Which written, Jobson
went near by
to lunch on lark and
oyster pie.

Which makes me wonder
whether He,
Jobson, who made the
lark made thee.'

And then consider, John, if we determine
to take this line, at the end of our careers
we might assume hereditary ermine
and hide our heads among a crowd of peers,

saying :

' The House of Lords
are waiting for
the newspaper
proprietor.

Soap ! Attention !
Listen ! Beer !
" Glory to the
new-made peer."

Hark ! the Heralds'
College sings,
as they fake his
quarterings.' "

" I'd rather be a politician, Peter ;
at least one knows the things for which they stand.
They don't choke dangerous dreams with borrowed
butter,
and stab ideas with daggers bought second-hand.

Surely there is some service one should be able
to offer in a world knee-deep in dirt,
if only in one inch of the Augean stable,
if only with a negligible squirt.

And yet——"
" And yet the Ruperts of debate,
the Robin Hoods of Parliament, don't throb
because injustice is the thing they hate,
but because indignation is their job,

saying :

' Making innumerable
statutes, men
merely confuse what
God achieved in ten.'

Then there's the Civil Service. Any takers ? "
" It's honest work, though not perhaps a part
for turbulent world-savers and world-shakers,
or those with fire underneath the heart."

" You for litotes, John ! ' Not for the world-shaker ! '
Oh, think of Trollope and cathedral cloisters,
with quiet clergymen who thank their Maker
for planning Chablis when He thought of oysters.

And Matthew Arnold—the sweet scholar-gipsy
who left his verse and the vext April gardens
to hold a sort of permanent autopsy
on the scholastic methods of churchwardens.

Oh, no, I'd rather echo what they say
was written in a moment of bitterness
by some poor Esau who gave his soul away
to Jacob for the customary mess :

' The world, which took six days to make,
one would be adequate to break.
Give me that day, God, or even a minute,
and let me deal with Whitehall in it.
Then one by one the Offices
would melt and shiver into trees,
and most of all the Treasury
would change into a chestnut-tree.
Till all the broken hearts and scandals
were tall and white and sweet as candles.
Then every typist to her lad
would glimmer as an Oread ;
and little clerk and bigger clerk
would bruise their knuckles on the bark,
until they doffed their tailored suit
and bowler-hat for leaves and flute.
And one would pipe and one would answer,
till from her hiding-place the dancer
would slip on little naked feet,
and dance with them in Downing Street.
And, where the politician lent
new ugliness to Parliament,
the spring would introduce a Bill
to legalize the daffodil.
There'd be no Ministries of Slaughter
at all by air or land or water,
but on a leafy quarter-deck
sailor-pigeons would preen their neck,

and most mellifluously curse
all war ; while as for soldiers,
they would declare eternal peace
in their slow-swinging rookeries.
Grass, trees, birds, fauns, and, best of all,
there'd be no War Memorial.' "

" That's Fleet Street, the Civil Service, and politics
disposed of, Peter. Unless we plump for law
or teaching, we shall have to make our bricks
by sleight of hand, and whistle for the straw.

And teaching is impossible unless,
like Heine's Northern fir under the false calm
of snow, a self-appointed loneliness
creates the desert and the waving palm.

There must be vicarious joy, and the sacrifice
of one's own summer for an unshared spring,
and to start the migrant swallows before the ice
back to their South, and never to stir a wing.

At best a kind of sainthood, and at worst
a drudgery, whose squalid hopes and fears
change what had seemed a martyrdom at first
into a gradual argument for Squeers."

" Well, that's full circle, John. We might of course
be gentlemen of the town—the sporting kind
who leave their clubs as though they'd left their horse
upstairs, and rather have him on their mind.

Or else we might be purely decorative
in the prevailing attitude of trusting
that somebody will find us means to live,
as long as we are languidly disgusting,

saying :

> ' Up and down Pall Mall, and then
> back to Piccadilly,
> educated gentlemen,
> exquisitely silly,
> sit about, and lounge about,
> talking, eating, drinking,
> and the only thing they do without
> (I understand) is thinking.'

But I'd forgotten business. It's a pity
young men like you so seldom will observe
the fact that, if it were not for the City,
all of us would inevitably starve.

If there were nobody to rig the prices
of articles they wouldn't know by sight,
how could we hope to have the annual crisis,
which is the Englishman's undoubted right ?

And if there weren't men whose fortunes made it
possible to leave their desks at half-past two
to play a round of golf, and no one played it,
well, what would golf professionals find to do ?

Nor let us listen to the Athenian
Plato—a snob who ignorantly raves
that trade is the one interest of man
that may appropriately be left to slaves.

And let our visionary souls affirm
the truth too subtle for Socratic eyes,
that, though a tradesman may appear a worm,
heroes alone are fit to merchandize.

And——"

"No, be quiet, Peter. I had rather
believe that business men are caught in traps,
and try to make believe (like my poor father)
that they were really most romantic chaps.

It stands to reason nobody would choose
to peddle soap with the future, like a trumpet
loud in a thousand misty avenues,
and therefore that they simply had to lump it.

So salutation to my gallant dead,
who went out boldly with a noise of bells,
perplexed, emphatic, and uncomforted—
and let us rather look for something else.

There is the law—oh, yes, I know you'll try
to prove that it is living by one's wits,
distorting justice, giving truth the lie—
the perfect exercise for hypocrites.

But, Peter, while men fail and sin and quarrel,
and it is necessary to have laws,
doesn't it follow as the obvious moral
there must be somebody to plead their cause ?

What of the hungry thief, the frightened cheat,
and all the fools who ignorantly err,
and what of the dark clouds that slowly beat
about the half-convicted murderer ? "

" Cicero in Verrem, John, the great attorney
carrying the guiltless shoulder-high through the crowd,
and setting him down at the end of the flushed journey,
observing splendidly, ' No fees allowed.'

And not the fashionable, pigeon-breasted
barrister who, by favour of the Press,
although his client hang, can still be trusted
to advertise a personal success.

And not the bully who, savage by turns and funny,
achieves a fortune, were it not forensic
would be regarded simply as blood-money
earned in a way to make all decent men sick.

' Let me tell you, gentle sirs,
advocates and barristers,
that the firm you're working for
is the old Solicitor,
whose advice (you may recall)
terminated in the Fall.'

And as to judges, John, have you forgotten
' he who is guiltless ? ' No ! it's not for you !
Come back to poetry—for it is written
' All things are false, and yet the heart is true.' "

" I am not afraid of judging. When the mist is
cold in the fields, who can answer for the day ?
But when the sun is up, the path of justice
runs broad and golden as the Pilgrims' Way.

Nor need I think of judging. It is enough
to plead——"
" And you are pleading this instant, John !
There is something else that you are thinking of.
Can it be candle-light to Babylon ? "

" And if it were, and I were thinking, Peter,
of life not by itself, but interchanged
with something older and infinitely greater—
lighted, distinct, and beautifully estranged.

If I were lifting my eyes up to the hills
where the immutable city of the heart's Rome
watches the roads of the world, through daffodils
. and the first crocus, find the one way home."

" Love is a dangerous word, John, to make use of
for your apology, so scrawled upon, so winter."
" And yet, say I, the swallow-word with news of
a still green wood not even the heart dares enter."

" What is the wood ? " " Not thrush or linnet has sung there,
nor primroses the spring's gold gossip published.
It is so new, not snowdrop's self were young there,
and April were a dynasty established."

" But even so, John, when the green leaf crumples,
when the birds have changed their throat, and the cuckoo's gone,
it is no dream, but life itself, that tramples
down the dim avenues, and passes on.

And swallow-word cannot hold it back in that hour,
nor anything but the naked fact prevail,
for you cannot fight the future with a flower,
nor storm redemption with the nightingale."

" But the lark-thought after the swallow-word,
that rose as high as that came from the South,
suddenly as St. Peter's single sword,
wild as the lips of Judas on Christ's mouth.

O herald-wings that lily and hawthorn follow !
O crescent voice ascending in the dark,
for ever free, and will you cage my swallow,
Peter, and must life mitigate my lark ? "

" I do not know, John," said the other, laying
an arm about his shoulder. " I only know
that we should be—if what my heart is praying
were granted—together always, and always so."

III

MR. JOHN CRAYFISH WAKES

Night in college. All the quad
quiet as the heart of God,
while on staircase No. 3
Crayfish tosses sleeplessly.

Falling moonflakes brightly stare
at the wildly ruffled hair,
on the yet unwrinkled brow
with a Lilliputian plough,
pencilling a lunar furrow
for the silver share of sorrow,
and converting all the face
with the moon's deliberate grace
to a pale unstony ground
only waiting for its wound.

Law and love, and love and law,
what was it that Peter saw
in the first and in the second
that so dangerously quickened,
till a man no longer knew
(with the moonlight breaking through)
whether any heart whatever
could be for the heavenly lover
more than her own shadow thrown
by the lost Endymion ?

Life was simple as a song
(Peter certainly was wrong) :

first the words and then the tune
written for them by the moon,
first the facts and then the scheme
laid upon them by the dream,
first the star and then the plan
even to Aldebaran
lending light outshining hers
of the stellar universe.

Life was simple—but in truth
there are undertones of youth
(whispering with Peter), "John !
Stay behind in Babylon,
do not use your candle-light
for the long remorseless night,
whence, however bright it burns,
John, no traveller returns.
Stay, oh, stay, but if you must
go, beloved and lovingest,
quickly go—lest I should weep.
Go ! " and Crayfish falls asleep.

Outside, moonflakes drifting heap
in the garden fathoms deep.
Deep ? What pools as shallow ? Yet
night's black navy (dreams) may set
shadowy sail on this small sea
from Gramarye to Gramarye.
Let John Crayfish softly sleep !
Moonflakes settle fathoms deep,
while dreams (black swans of midnight)
swim
to make their wings a nest for him.

IV

THE FIDDLER

FAREWELL TO YOUTH

Agamemnon sleeps at last in Argos.
  Be still, nightingales. No king
will marshal the long ships now
  by the sand-beaches. Why do you sing?

Achilles is fleet of foot no longer.
  Hector is the dust of a moth's wing,
and the great shield is tarnished.
  Argive nightingales, why do you sing?

It is over, Agamemnon, Agamemnon,
  the Iliad of our youth and of spring.
Oh, why do men love like heroes;
  and nightingales! why do you sing?

BOOK II

ENTRANCE TO THE CITY

LOVE BY THE WAY

Argument

Crayfish's first love goes through the stages of exaltation, inspired companionship, doubt, separation, aching regret, and finally, ten years later, friendship in disillusion. It is not explicitly stated that he has, in the meantime, made a marriage compatible with his career.

BOOK II

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Let them bring you lilies !
  Why should I complain,
who can bring the mercy
  of lilies in the rain ?

Let them bring you diamonds !
  I will bring the wet
stones from Aphrodite's
  wave-green carcanet.

Let them bring you Chambertin !
  I will never quarrel
making nectar of my ale
  with a sprig of laurel.

Let them pluck the evening,
  cool and sweetly drawn !
I am in the greenwood,
  gathering the dawn.

Let them be as gods are
  if they wish or can !
I will be a fiddler
  and a lover and a man.

I

JUNGE LIEBE

It is light as a leaf,
  as strong as steel.
There is no grief
  so striped to feel.

There is no happiness
  so bitter bright
as the dark kiss
  in the deep night.

It is surrender,
  and the taken city,
certainty, wonder,
  and brutal pity.

It is to be thrall
  and utterly free.
It is to be all,
  and not to be.

II

THE SILVER CAT

Two orange candles like cat's eyes
glittered. The yellow tapestries
were smooth against the dark, and all
the room, like a hushed waterfall,
plunged softly down between the two
who sat together all night through.

She spoke across the darkness. " Slow
the dark dividing moments go
between us, and, before we guess,
there is an end of loveliness.
What do we gain by sitting still ?
The distant dawn on daffodil
cities, unseen of us, awakes,
and even now the mountain-lakes,
between that touch of lips and this,
change with the sun to topazes.
Or slimmer than slim willow-trees,
in silver secret, Javanese
Srimpis—cold ballet—weave in trance
still, save for sliding hands, their dance,
unseen by us. By us unseen,
under red eaves in gold Pekin
the yellow dotards, peering, gauge
the leap of crickets in a cage.
Beauty is spilling thus even now
through all the world, while I and thou—
we sit in dark, where no winds stir,
nor seas, each other's prisoner.
For orange moons in skies of jade

these candles. For the ambuscade
of drifting isles on lifting seas
we have these quiet tapestries.
For distance and all adventurings,
this room, and for the white bird's wings
up, up, and still white wings above——"
"For all these things," he answered, "Love."

"Tell me of love," she whispered. Stale
jewels—the candle-flames grew pale,
and sank. The room a midnight pool
with night's dark shape was beautiful.
Pool-charmèd, he spoke with the grave
cold accent that still waters have.

"What is the world but a guess and a blending
of what was never with that which has no ending?
The waves—those crumpled lions—are but a shadow
of motion in the green mind, sky's loamy meadow
is with the punctured gold of vision starry,
and on her shoulders slim a dream must carry,
Atlas—the weight of the world's loveliness.
And Eastern cities, though daffodil, no less
oar and are anchored in the mind. At most
built of an air so delicate, so ghost,
a whisper of death's wind, and each one slips
her cable for the dark. And these dim ships
no port for all their burthen of beauty have,
and there is no sea, no landfall in the grave.
These are the ensigns of mortality,
but love from their bright difference is free.
And where he is, what sees and what is seen

are one, and he has healed the old chagrin
'twixt the thinker and his thought. And there's no war
between the star that sets and the rising star ;
for all love's battles are civil victories,
war self-declared and internecine peace.
Is he accused of quiet ? But love goes riding
to adventure beyond the world, and still he's chiding
the measurable hearts, whose fears would bind him,
and the cries of the cowards falling shrill behind him.
But love (for you) is only wings that brush
the spirit afraid and a whisper in the hush,
that stops the heart on a beat ! Yet think of this !
When you are old, a pale, forgotten kiss
will touch your eyelids where you sit and ponder,
and all will be gone from you then, all youth, all
wonder
—the coloured cities you knew, the amethyst
pennons on the lance of dawn, and the white mist
unrolling from the world—all will be gone,
but the kiss will touch your eyes, where you sit alone."

Thus he. With lips that hardly move,
" Let in the dawn," she said, " and love."
He drew the curtains, and at that
from where he lay a silver cat
rose, stretched his silly paws to yawn
at the geraniums of the dawn,
whose petals splashed the window. Then
curled himself up to sleep again.

III

PASSION AND DOUBT

Let down your hair ! I dare not see your eyes,
  and in its shadow, round about me furled,
the little clamour of my passion dies,
  and with the death of passion dies the world.

Let down your hair ! Oh, better to be ravelled
  in that embalmèd darkness than to see
how love upon your lips has always travelled
  nearer to beauty, but away from me.

Let down your hair ! And, though I needs must stumble
  in that sweet shade benighted, I shall find
my heart that was too proud to see, too humble
  to know, or even care, that I am blind.

IV

THE SHADOW

If it should chance that envious fate
should separate
two mountain rills that in a single
great flood should mingle,
and pour with gathering ecstasy
—one river—to the sea,

still where the hidden source is
of mountain water-courses,
though these, divided, reach the plain,
there will remain
unspoiled the white conjecture of the snows
in which they rose.

Nor need the rills, though summer dry them,
and loveliness pass by them,
parched amid rocks and grasses hardly wet
their origins forget
in the high snows, and how, when they began,
in beauty they were one.

Nor we, who from a single beauty drew,
exquisite with dew,
as the first morning light is lifted up
in the cold crystal cup
of lilies, with that vintage thrice-distilled,
brimmingly filled,

nor we, though it should chance that fate
our lives should separate,
will, disunited, be attended less
with that first loveliness,
by which, although our paths depart from it
our secret heart is lit.

And, though nor hands nor lips should ever meet
again, and all things sweet
of which we dreamed go by us on the wind,
as all this falls behind,
seeming to lose, by loss itself we win
back to our origin.

And closer than the heart is to the side
with the bright tide
of that far watershed, from which we go
farther and farther, flow
and ebb our lives, not asking whence nor whither
—one stream—together.

V

THE DEEPER SHADOW

I have held out my hand, but more than that was needed.
I have held out my heart, and that was not enough.
I have prayed in all your heavens. Did I pray unheeded?
What must I give, what more do you ask of me, love?

I gave you my youth, when youth was all my possession;
I gave you my faith, seeking a greater in you;
There is no place between us two for compassion,
What, my belovèd, I ask, would you have me do?

I cannot pretend that it is still southern weather,
with the firefly stars caught in the tamarisk,
or that we still are islanded together
in those pine-scented thoughts deep as the dusk.

It is daylight now, belovèd, and if love will not face
the declaration of the sun, shall we admit
that we, who have been such missionaries of grace,
must now, no longer entrusted, surrender it?

That we must be content to have known all this,
and to go one from another for ever allied
by rhythms which will not die in the silences—
a lover in an old dream and his ghostly bride?

If it must be so, let's not weep nor complain
if I have failed, or you, or life turned sullen.
We have had these things. They do not come again,
but the flag still flies, and the city has not fallen.

VI

EVENING

As Dante stood by the bridge and she passed him by,
so at the end of May, when the windflowers
have breathed and drifted, too delicate to die,
I shall let her loveliness pass, not mine, but hers.

She shall move into the years a chord and a pastime
for the creating sound to use as a model,
holding her thus for the first and the last time,
with the mist of her hair for the string of a fiddle.

And play ! What should I play ? There is nothing to sing of
save the curve of her arm, as she leans it behind her
in the tulip-curve that a god makes the spring of.
I cannot recapture, how then should I bind her ?

I had better stand back, and let her pass over.
Then no one will cheat me, and no one will share
her step like a leaf in the dream of a lover,
the moon that has fingered the sheaves of her hair.

VII

FIRST MEMORY

Let no one think,
because I am no longer crying
for her mouth, and the stir of her breast,
that the old link
between mind and body is lying
broken, and the heart's at rest.

Oh, no ! think this :
deeper than the crying is the need,
and the tortured memory, how deep !
and the ghost of a kiss
may make an old wound bleed,
and a dead man mutter slowly in his sleep.

VIII

TWO MORE MEMORIES

I

I think it was the storm. For nothing else
was changed at all. There was the sound of bells
that came with the flaws of wind from Kerrara,
suddenly loud, more sudden stilled—the way
they had echoed in my mind, and promised me
that the isle of my boyhood in my boyhood's sea
waited among her mists. All else was hushed,
save where the rain's unchanging besoms brushed
the dustless leaves (had I not heard them, God?)
of the pale trees on the Glencruitan Road.
The path grows wild there—at the very place
where the burn is hidden still with watercress,
and round the corner, with mosses overgrown,
the cottage stands, which, stone by weathered
stone,
my heart had built. Then suddenly the leap
into the hills, and the silence of the road,
which in such silence, silent, I had trod
in dreams. And then, like trumpets altogether,
mile after mile the purples of the heather.
And in the midst my springs! was never water
that had so cool a throat of lilied laughter,
was never tide caught in the moon's long mesh
under the wind so indomitably fresh.
And after thirst so sharp, such hungerings,
I found rank water and the yellow springs.

I say it was the storm—or else I must
believe we fashion dusty dreams of the dust

of what has never been—in the wind to twist
out of a mist into a deeper mist.

II

Let us go back the mountain-way
between St. Cergue and Arzier,
with flowers scattered for the trace
by love in the long paper-chase
where heart—the hare—is never found
by heart—the everlasting hound,
and where the hunter and his quarry,
never relaxing, never hurry,
assured that nothing but a ghost
will ever pass the winning-post.
And as the swallows reconnoitre
the skies, it may be spring will loiter
back into time, and be again,
as green as those, as those in vain.
Till we, convinced by that high clamour
through the heart's autumn out of summer
will blindly tread, awakening
in vain (God help that heart!) in spring.
In vain, in vain, and yet because
it will not be, it never was,
let us, while noontide turns to eve,
against all evidence believe
the flower's coloured argument
that love returns the way he went.
And let us dare (or feign) to follow
the misdirection of the swallow,
and, though we cannot see, at least
die with our faces to love's east.

IX

NIGHT

Out of my great wealth I would have given you
a world, or, if that were not enough, a constellation.
I would have hitched up Charles's Wain and driven you
past all blessings that men have known, and all
damnation.

And that is not idle rhetoric. For a world is at best
a thought
that God had long ago, when He was making His
rhymes,
and a constellation is a gold handful tangled and caught
in the silver nets of His immortality at different times.

Yes, any lover could make you a world on the instant,
or find one for you with a dream's divining-rod,
but what he will fail of always is the constant
in the multitudinous silences of God.

Oh, God is a gold spider who spins without a thread,
and He catches nothing with infinite slow relish,
and nothing in lost love is half so incredibly dead,
and nothing half so unbelievably heaven and hellish.

So that I leave you to Him, my web being scattered,
but even now, with the threads trailing cold on my
cheek,

I remember the world where the dawns were unshuttered,
and the lark had the language you taught me to speak.

I remember my world, and, a wanderer banished,
I look back by the waters of Babylon,
and I build in my heart, dismantled and punished,
even now in the dust, another one.

X

THE FADED TAPESTRY

Ten times since then the blossom has shone and
scattered,
ten times the thrush has negligently stuttered,
and after sung full-throated notes, first sullen,
then pure as light or God on Eden fallen.

Ten times the cuckoo over meadow and copse
has played all Primavera on two stops,
ten times the curious sun has sought to strip
the undried varnish from the buttercup.

Ten times the cowslips, clinging to their stem,
have made the mead all butterfly with them,
ten times the blackbird has whistled, and left behind
not sound, but almond-blossom in the mind.

This is the landscape of the dust, ennobled
by the eyes it charmed, the ears once softly troubled.
It is not absolute : but dulls for darkened
eyes, and declines on ears that have not hearkened.

And now the flowers unnaturally bloom,
the birds descant, as in a quiet room
where colour and voice slowly begin to be
merged in a long forgotten tapestry.

The threads unravel ! Agamemnon's spear
breaks in the middle—the hunted deer
fades with the covert ! And, her eyes as dim
as her dead hunter's, Venus watches him.

XI

LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

Love quits the stage, and in his place
friendship appears with easy grace,
a Congreve, who with level tongue
elucidates what Shakespeare sung,
parsing with equitable prose
the fragrant diction of the rose.
He does not quarrel, too well-bred
to be discourteous with the dead,
but lets his reticence convey
what he's too Caroline to say.
He lifts his eyeglass with a lens,
whose Restoration common-sense
makes of the landscapes of the dawn
plans a surveyor might have drawn.
He hears a lark ; 'tis well enough :
and sees a crocus. Gallant stuff !
But spring, he can but feel, has showed
a green oblivion of the mode.
Her blues are crude, the sudden yellow
is not—though admirable—mellow,
and music innocent of art
is only fit to move the heart.
To walk politely in the cool
of eve is not unbeautiful,
and who'd seek hyacinths in Arden
when there are tulips in a garden ?
And who'd not give the lilac kind
of Juliet and Rosalind,
with all their star-bewildered rant,
for half an hour with Millamant ?
(Fainter and smaller, in the dusk,

like lanterns seen through tamarisk,
or fireflies that vex the stars,
the harp, rebeck, and dulcimers
flicker and fade beside the meadows,
where spear-bright in a world of shadows
move, three in one, and one in three,
love, Egypt, and Mark Antony.)
He taps his snuff-box, flicks the traces
of powder from his Mechlin laces,
but leaves, or does not see, the stain
of starshine, round as drops of rain.
All's one for that ! Between the brown
notes of the calculated town,
he hears indulgently beyond
the roofs the distant diamond
of Philomel, who cannot be
a niggard of her jewellery,
but flings it up, and out, and on
for milestones to Avilion.
Sing on, sing out, on moon-swept boughs,
wild bird, and in his coffee-house
let Congreve hear, while Shakespeare sings,
the echo of departing wings.

XII

DA VINCI'S WOMAN

Love, like da Vinci's woman,
pinches his lips, his eyes
lit with a cold inhuman
absence of all surprise.

He neither smiles nor winces,
but with an equal breath
discounts life's bright pretences
and the dark fraud of death.

He is not God to pardon,
to judge, nor disbelieve.
He is himself the Garden,
and all the world is Eve.

Nay, then it were nothing—
  or only this, Jaques,
to know that leaves tumble
  when the tree shakes,

to know that in winter
  the snow will fall,
and cover the branches
  and love and all.

" Sing no more in Arden,
  Jaques or Rosalind.
There is a garden
  you will never find,

set about with holly,
  guarded with thorn,
where love in folly,
  laughing was born.

Green was the willow,
  slowly the stream
threaded the hollow
  arch of a dream.

Aye, but it rippled
  into a pool,
water-lily dappled,
  to snare a fool.

Sing no more in Arden,
  Rosalind and Jaques.
There is a garden
  where love never wakes."

BOOK III

SCENES IN THE CITY

Argument

Incidents in the life of Mr. Crayfish ; his appearance as counsel defending a prostitute ; his difficulties with his daughter in his middle years ; his hearing of a charge of blasphemy shortly after his appointment to the Bench.

BOOK III

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Look in your heart ! There find the snowdrop wither
and the rose, in fallen silks about love's feet,
shine fair a moment, and so pass altogether
with the long bitterness of remembered sweet.

Where are they gone (look deep !), the dreams, youth's spies on
the dangerous armies of life ? Where do they tarry
love's green vedettes, beyond what far horizons
how slowly returning with their hooves how weary ?

Where is the world (look deep !) that the heroes trod,
with the future lashed like a falcon to their wrists ?
Where are the nights in whose pavilions God
waited to slip the dawn into the lists ?

Look deep ! where none remembers and none pities
the faded pageantries of hope, where the high town
of youth is least among the dispeopled cities,
and the tall towers of Trojan love are down.

Look deep into your heart on these and that,
and when you come to judge, remember how,
as you will then be standing at the Gate
of pardon, all these lost are standing now.

I

MR. CRAYFISH WALKS HOME FROM THE COURTS

Argument

Mr. Crayfish, in the early thirties, is defending a prostitute charged with accosting. She is sentenced. Crayfish at first rebels against the injustice of condemning a woman for being young and pretty. He permits himself to be half persuaded, and walks home seeing the whole spring smirched and tarnished. He is conscious that the spring in his heart is equally tainted, and sees the shadow of the prison at the end of all the pathways of Primavera.

All that has mercy,
all that pities,
share in the heavenly
"*Nunc dimittis.*"

For all that has failed,
that cried "*De profundis*,"
"balm," chaunt the bells,
"in the heart where the wound is."

THE MONUMENT

The Monument with
its golden wire
reminds us that London
was once on fire.

But the soot on the gold
that fumbles and splashes
reminds us how long she
has lain in her ashes.

KITTY

" Kitty 'ad found
religion and
joined the Salvation
Army Band.

You know young 'Arry,
' sober John,'
the one that Kitty
was crazy on ?

'E nods to the gel
in a friendly manner,
seein' 'er walk behind
the banner.

And (would you believe it ?)
before the crowd
she calls to 'Arry
right out loud ;

' Christ died for sinners,
'Arry, like wot
we two 'ave been ' ; and he says
like a shot :

' Forgive me, miss, I'd 'ate to
be rude in
public, but surely
you're not alludin'

to me along with
yourself, because,
if you were a drab,
I never was.'

And goes off whistling
as neat as neat,
' Give my regards to
Coventry Street.'

She deserved it, of course,
but ain't it a pity
a thing like that should
'appen to Kitty ? "

Most unfortunate, most distressing,
but isn't the penal code a blessing,
under whose admirable provisions
Kitty appeared at Quarter Sessions
(having relapsed) upon the disgusting
charge of gratuitously accosting
a man called 'Arry, whose name and address
(to spare him pain) were withheld from the Press
And counsel instructed against the wench
was easily able to prove to the Bench
that, in order to save young men from corruption,
she must be imprisoned without the option.

" Liars the lot of them ; lying's their trade,"
the magistrate thought, as he sentenced the jade.
And perfectly right, as is proved by the very
horrible story about Edgware Mary :

" Edgware Mary, when
she was dying,
says to us, ' Listen ! I'm
fed up with lying.

I'm not a lady, like
wot I said.
So don't you gels think it ! '
But when she was dead

we sent for a parson,
thinkin' we ought ter,
and damned if she wasn't
the old feller's daughter."

But the barrister briefed to conduct the defence —a man called Crayfish—was hard to convince that to sentence a woman to six months' hard was precisely the method that Jesus preferred when He said, " Let the guiltless among you be the first to pronounce on adultery."

Saying :

" The judges engage in
a game that is known
(but not to the players!) as
' Throw the first stone.'

But the rules of the game have
been varied by them,
since the day it was played
at Jerusalem.

And the fact that a judge
may himself be a sinner
is all the more reason
for being a winner."

But later he was half persuaded
to tell his conscience, as they did,
that the rabbit screaming in the snare
must understand that she is there
for her own good, and that her paws
are smashed by conscientious laws,
designed to stabilise the habits
of other less incautious rabbits.
Moreover, as a lawyer, who
puts dozens of these cases through,
explained, they realised themselves
you couldn't do the thing by halves.
Indeed, the man went on to say,
in their self-conscious Cockney way
they saw the business with a grim
humour, that appealed to him.

Saying :

" Why do we call her
  ' Glory for me ? '
Because she sang it
  lunch, dinner, and tea.

' The same as mother,'
  she used to say,
' before I left 'er
  went singing all day.'

But wait a minute ;
  here's the joke.

Her going sent mother
dumb with a stroke."

And, while they argued in the street,
the spring had sent her fishing-fleet
to grapple with their golden trawls
Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's.
But first the heart, dismayed and cankered,
seeing the sun divinely anchored
to the great Cross, was half inclined
to put the subject out of mind.

For :

Out of the roar and
trouble
Sir Christopher
blew this bubble,
and, lest it should shatter,
he tied it
to the heaven he dreamed
of inside it.

And still the spring continued her
advances upon Westminster,
attempting with Danaan showers
the two most stolid of church towers,
that fold their arms and make a fetish
of all that's dullest in the British.

And all the time the golden nets
were fishing for St. Margaret's,
until the Abbey and the Church
became a sort of Wedding March.
And Mr. Crayfish, certain that
the Ark had touched on Ararat,
slipping inside, despatched his raven
to look, if not for land, for heaven,
and bring back in its beak for Kitty
a leaf from the Celestial City.

But though the spring poured through the glass
—chalcedony and chrysoprase—
with the many-coloured kiss
of harebell and of primroses,
in spite of all that reckless gold
the abbey-church was bitter cold.
Bitter cold, and on his ear
sceptic sighs began to veer
like a draught along the dust
on some Georgian statesman's bust ;

WESTMINSTER ABBEY I

Since the rich and successful are apter
to commend themselves to the Chapter
there's no place for the broken and shabby
dead in Westminster Abbey.
But in every niche and corner
the ghost of a dead Jack Horner
says to the other ghosts drifting by,
" Don't you wish you had been as clever as I ? "

while he plunges his thumb
into Kingdom Come.

Crayfish walks home arguing
mutinously with the spring.

" When with your madrigals and chanties
you set me jigging in the twenties,
you promised I should always be
the partner of Persephone.
And when she was accused by dunces
of filching Time by green pretences,
I was retained, you said, as her
standing and vernal barrister.
And when the usual hanging-judge,
for whom all youth is a green smudge
upon a decent world of grey,
asked what is spring, I found the way
to answer him, you will agree,
with your own primrose repartee,"

Thus :

SPRING IN LONDON I

" When all the London boys begin
with one accord their tops to spin,
when girls through last year's rubbish grope
for what looks like a skipping-rope,
when even babies turn from croup
to tumble with a wooden hoop,
and minnows tremble at the string—
then London trembles into spring.

When motor-buses, eastward stepping,
make the distant port of Epping,
when taxis give a single snort
and find themselves at Hampton Court,
when every lover and his lass
go Underground to Lyonesse—
then costermongers' barrows bring
—yellow and white—the London spring.

When every Round Pond goose is chuckling
at the perfection of her duckling,
and two grey cygnets make the swan
the proudest bird in Kensington,
when the fresh water stings like brine
the gulls along the Serpentine,
and every sparrow has his fling—
your ludship, that's the London spring."

" And why," he asks, " did you desert his
side, lovely traitor, in the thirties ?
Were you, for instance, present when
two perfect English gentlemen
considered April was the time
for punishing the frightful crime
of being foolish, young, and pretty,
and absolutely broke, like Kitty ?
Because, if it is possible
to sentence crocus-girls to hell,
indeed, to treat them as a votive
offering to the moral motive,
and fold the hands across the stomach

as placidly as in a hammock,
then all these gardens are a sort
of ante-chamber to the court,
with every kind of fear and anger
tracking down—a doppelgänger—
the bright and painted, but how brief,
figment of song, and blade, and leaf.
No doubt the blackbird, yellow-billed,
will ask to have his name withheld,
but still suggests one ought to shoot
the thrush—a common prostitute—
who sings—the indiscriminate bitch—
equally to poor and rich,
while tulips in their neat domestic
beds indict the shameless rustic
daisies and buttercups, already
an invitation to everybody.
And finally the hawthorn-trees,
whose unpretentious modesties
had flowered into red or white
scandals in a single night,
would file a suit that spring should be
convicted of debauchery,
and sentenced for divine corruption
by loveliness without the option."
All this, and for that other plea,
I hear one saying sullenly,
in answer to the hanging-judge,
" Your lordship's right. Spring's a green smudge
on life, but it is something else,
one of the ugly miracles
that changes wine into ditchwater,
and makes a harlot of all our daughter."

Thus :

" When the high laughter of the lark
astounds, it does not free, the clerk,
who stands and listens, as she mounts
radiantly beyond accounts
into the undiscovered country
of heavenly mirth, no double entry
disturbs, and where none's auditing
the blue expenditure of spring.

She does not free him, nor release
the puzzled spirit into peace,
but, as she sings with the dim sound
of a ship's bell to sailors drowned,
he stumbles onward with his head
bent to the sunken ocean-bed,
where all his life sways mouldering
a thousand fathoms under spring.

And when the flower-sellers dare
to ply their trade in Leicester Square,
when snowdrops, nun-like, flawless, crisp,
less flowers than a little gasp
of white astonishment, are offered
to all the women who have chaffered
the flowers, that no tears will bring
nor God in any other spring.

Then one might reasonably assume,
your lordship, that there is not room
nor common air in the one City
for snowdrops and the creature Kitty,

and therefore that your verdict is
not merely bourgeois prejudice,
but shows you are not sentencing
Kitty so much as God and spring."

Now evening settles in the gardens,
and something deep in Crayfish hardens
to bitter self-contempt and anger
with his own youth—a clumsy stranger
with ruffled air, who vaguely urges
that somehow suffering enlarges
the heart, and to the lost and shabby
thus defends Westminster Abbey :

WESTMINSTER ABBEY II

" When you were living, they made me harden
my heart, but now I ask your pardon,
poor dead, who, smaller than a mouse,
scuffle about your Father's house.
My aisles for you are dim, my nave
has the high silence of the grave,
and my great windows will not let
the sun affright you, nor moon forget.
There is more joy in heaven, poor dead,
for one division comforted,
for one lost life that finds in death
the village-lights of Nazareth,
than for a saint, or blameless king
magnificently entering.
And first for you, but last for them,
my organ murmurs ' Requiem.' "

But Crayfish will not listen. " Out !
All out ! " the dim gatekeepers shout.
Crayfish, like all the others, sent
with evening into banishment,
stares bewildered, as though he were
not walking home to Bayswater,
but moving to a doom assigned,
leaving his youth and spring behind.
And as he turns to go he sees
an evil shape (beyond all these
echoes and dreams) that rises grim
at the end of every road for him.
Sullen brick, and on the gate
written, " Enter and learn to hate ! "
with towers like the broken stubs
of dead cigars—meet Wormwood Scrubs !
the only abbey for such as Kitty
in all the Uncelestial City !

WORMWOOD SCRUBS

" I think there must be some
black magic in the drum !
For the fiddle, the flute, and the brass
stir in the heart, and pass
with a flicker of flowers or wings.
But dark and different things
mutter in the drum, and crack
into the soul like a black
ghost in a garden of white
hollyhocks, haunting by night.

I have heard fiddles shrilly
sweet in Piccadilly,

when London life goes past in spring
like Mrs. Siddons curtseying.

And in the copper-beeches
at Kew a flute beseeches
with her single argent glimmer
of delight the London summer.

Yes ! and the golden shout
of brass is all about
winter, with a fire lit,
and all London warm at it.

Fiddle to fiddle, flute to flute
answer, and with the brass are mute.
But all the time, as soft as sleep,
dark, continual, and deep,
ebbing, flowing, parting, meeting,
as though he were your own heart beating,
a sullen distant drummer drubs,
' Youth and spring in Wormwood Scrubs.' "

When the shabby little whore
clumsily knocked at heaven's door,
the timid impulse, like a shell,
burst screaming past the archangel.
The door half opened, " 'Ere," she said,
" can I come in, sir, bein' dead ?
The gentleman as kep' me swore
that, as I'd live, I'd die a whore,
' and so,' says 'e, ' you might as well
save time and go off straight to 'ell.' "
" But, child," the saint said, " this is heaven."
" May I," she muttered, " be forgiven !
If I ain't gone and mucked it ! Well,
s'long ; I'll find my way to 'ell."
All heaven was still. " Aren't you afraid
of punishment ? " Saint Peter said.
" Why, no," replied the little whore,
" I don't see I could suffer more."
" If we forgive " (all heaven was hushed),
" have you forgiven us ? " She blushed.
" Wot, me ? I shouldn't 'ave the cheek !
I'd best be going." The voice said, " Speak !
All heaven waits." " O Lord," she cried,
" can't a whore 'ave 'er proper pride ? "
The door swung open at a touch.
" Enter," the voice said, " for of such . . . "

II

MR. CRAYFISH, K.C., AND CONTEMPORARY YOUTH

Argument

Ten years later, Mr. Crayfish, K.C., is discussing over the fire with Peter Arkwright the affairs of his daughter, Helen Devizes, who is unduly intimate with one Jim Trodley—once in the Guards, now practising a doubtful profession as a sort of Society spiritualist. Crayfish attacks modern youth bitterly. He finds his daughter's attitude to morals intolerable and unintelligible. Her lover—Trodley—is in great difficulties because two of his " mediums " have committed suicide at different times. The case of the second one, Sludge, is to come before the coroner. It is particularly unpleasant, as his daughter was with Trodley on the night that Sludge was found in the " ghost-cellar " with his head in the gas-oven. Arkwright urges that he must appear for Trodley, and Crayfish, declaring that it is against his principles, agrees. It is indicated by the Press reports that Helen Devizes is likely shortly to make arrangements enabling her to marry Trodley, and that, by virtue of Crayfish's intervention, Trodley has no difficulties with the coroner.

The saint, with the sinner,
  let that one and this come,
for all that is human
  the *pax vobiscum.*

The *pax vobiscum*, the
  floral peace
of lemon-blossom
  and orange-trees.

" Well, John ! "
" Well, Peter ! "
" Thought I would look round
before I went to bed—needed to stretch
my legs a little. As you know, I've found
a walk before bedtime is——"
" You lying wretch !

you think I'm overworking because I'm worried
about the child and Trodley. I suppose
that some day, she'll remember that she is married,
and then—continue powdering her nose.

I can't make out those children."
" My dear fellow
they're characters, not flesh and blood like us,
out of a play written by Pirandello
to prove that feelings are ridiculous.

Or else the post-war two-dimensional age
of the films—no thickness—only breadth and height,
and all the world (at Hollywood) a stage,
and all the men and women tricks of light.

They have their exits and their entrances.
They wait upon the summons for the latter
of a shirt-sleeved American, who is
in need of some attention from his hatter.

As to their exits, they will fade (not die)
out of the picture when a little later
a more expensive film is featured by
an equally indifferent Operator.

He was so slight a thing,
he was so white a thing
with his beautiful body, and the sinuous grace
of his tenuous face.

She was so young a thing,
she was so unwrung a thing,
with the easy movement and the limber charm
with slumber warm.

He was so adored a thing,
he was so bored a thing,
with no knowledge, no wisdom, and the loneliness
of his wistful unmanliness.

She was so unbroken a thing,
so wholly unwoken a thing,
with her golden cropped head like a girl with a lily
by Botticelli.

They were so unintentional a thing,
so one-dimensional a thing,
that they asked one another at parties
where and what the heart is.

They were so untaught a thing,
so strangely distraught a thing,
that, when that heart broke for them,
it melted like smoke for them.

They were so trifling a thing,
they were so heart-rifling a thing,
that an angel was caught by the nebulous grace
of their fabulous face.

And seeing them so screen a thing,
so warped, yet so clean a thing,
cried to Saint Peter, " O Peter, be merciful
to this mock Parsifal.

And since she's so faint a thing,
so sinner and saint a thing,
O Peter, be gentle and let
her play Margaret.

Since they're so frail a thing,
so a child's-tale a thing,
heard in the nursery, let them pretend
Peter, to the end.

Silver in mail and helm
in an eternal film,
let him go flashing as if he played
in a Crusade.

And because of the spring in her
that has broken a wing in her,
let Columbine for ever spin
with her dream-Harlequin.

Set them for ever free
from immortality,
and a shadow shall be heaven by shadows enticed
for them,
and a shadow be God and a shadow be Christ
for them."

" But, Peter, after all the girl is mine.
I can't look on the various things that trouble
'em
as something that a thinker might define
as characteristics of the social problem.

You can fool life perhaps at twenty-one,
at twenty-five still treat it as a topic,
but after that the farce will lose its fun,
and, whether you like it or not, become an epic.

Thersites still may talk through the edge of his
teeth
in studios, and Helen ogle her Paris,
but both of them are listening underneath
their breath to a great footstep that never
hurries.

Some day a careless hand will crash the chin
of the poor jester, and leave him a dead boy ;
some night the torches will blaze upon her sin,
and burn her beauty with all the tale of Troy.

But tell me, Peter, about this creature Trodley.
What have you heard ? They tell me that the lads
(before he left the army) concluded sadly
that he was simply one of Nature's cads.

I could have understood a literary lizard,
the little crawling kitchen-things that scuffle
about at night—that women buy haphazard
because they're cheap, or pick up in a raffle.

But I can't see this military type,
who couldn't even hold the officer's job
of shouting in the morning, ' Shoulder ! hipe ! '
and playing cards all evening at his club.

Thus :

' If I were a Woolwich
or Sandhurst cub,
I'd join a most
exclusive club.

And loll in the window
and play at cards,
and drink more claret,
by yards and yards,

than any other
subaltern.
For by this method
I should earn

a military repu-
tation,
as one who understood
the station

to which he had
received his call—
and die a major-
general.'

What she finds in him I simply can't imagine.
I hear that he's a sort of fortune-teller
who, *pace* the police, contrives to cadge in
the purlieus of a Piccadilly cellar."

" And why not, seeing Piccadilly Circus
itself is something of a midnight palmist,
whose ' Drink and be merry ' cannot fail to jerk us
into the mood commended by the psalmist :

Piccadilly Circus
glows
at the world's heart,
a midnight rose.

And what in all
her beauty stirs
under the moon
her worshippers ?

What is her message ?
Line by line
the simple read
who seek a sign :

Omnia ab uno disce !
Man shall his salva-
tion win,
either by old Shetland
whiskey
or through Martin's
London Gin.

But seriously there are two current versions about him. One that he's a charlatan engaging in Egyptian Hall contortions to live on the only basis that he can :

'Mr. Jim Trodley,
known as Crash,
was almost always,
short of cash.

A bit of a drunkard,
rather a glutton,
and educated (of course)
at Eton—

the sort of
racing-tipster who
wins our battles
of Waterloo.

He might have starved,
and he certainly would,
except for his gambler's
aptitude

with a pack of cards, when
his skill was such
that he seemed to know
them all by touch.

When he went to his mother
after a smash,
Lady Irene murmured :
" Crash,

not a penny ! But
listen to me,
this manual
dexterity

shows you're a sharper,
or else a psychic.
And, whichever it happens to be,
well ! why kick ?

Set up a booth
near Piccadilly,
and the fact that you drink,
and were born half-silly,

won't stand in the way
of a fortune-teller,
who can shuffle the cards
through the back of his collar." '

The second suggests that some sudden esoteric
voice whispered from Damascus, and at the call,
like a dull sentence he merged into the lyric
under a poet's compulsion and was Paul.

However that may be, he gave up cards,
left all his clubs, and (so the tale insists),
one morning a second-lieutenant in the Guards
woke up the greatest of all spiritualists.

Not merely table-rapping or funnels jumbling
something Napoleon may once have said,
nor a trick-cyclist gravely reassembling
the features of the ectoplasmic dead.

But, what is rather like a new religion,
direct approach to ultimate Being, freed
from inhibitions of custom and all contagion
by the slave-quality of the Christian creed,

stripping the sterile crown of thorns, like a wreath
at a Greek banquet, from a reveller's curls,
and flinging this body of life to the body of death
like a calm god throwing the swine his pearls,

letting the spirit free to wander loose
in the prairies of space at the casual mercy
of some moon's ancient and heretical views,
of some great planet's ungovernable hearsay.

Indeed, this dabbles in things too venomous
even for satire. For, unless the mesh hold
that grips men on to life, then all of us
are delivered to the Watcher on the Threshold.

And there's a narrow difference between
hysteria and the hunting-tune that's played
far off, high up, and delicately obscene—
the ' Whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad.' "

" Nonsense and evil nonsense, as you agree !
But, Peter, in a crazy world like this
Don Juan may even use insanity
for his abominable purposes.

But what is one to do ? Call him a cheat,
she agrees heartily, and finds it comic.
Speak of her husband, she replies, ' Poor sweet ! '
and as for love, calls it an epidemic,

as though the love of our youth were an exiled king
that his people abandoned, and he did not harden
his heart against them, but remembered in spring
there had been violets in his palace garden.

And how he had not found his queen, but had dreamed
that somewhere at the source of flowers he would discover
beyond the terraces the pale unclaimed
hands of the unimaginable lover.

And that was all his witchcraft, though growing dimmer,
as the dream withdrew, still beautifully enough,
and while he dreamed, the mob, with sickle and hammer,
had smashed the bow and arrows of young love.

And now the proletariat of youth in folly
have sacked the garden of Psyche sod by sod,
and in her place, with nettles and poisonous holly,
have crowned Priapus as the garden-god.

And as for Trodley and his mountebanking
with the Black Mass for lust, or the money from it,
I think that I can guess what God is thinking
of these tumble-bugs that batten on their own
vomit.

And if it ever fall to me to deliver
sentence as judge on such a crime as this,
then, for the sake of the immortal lover,
I will avenge their mortal blasphemies.

As to my girl, I could have prayed to heaven,
not for the gift was lent Pygmalion,
but that to him who begot her there might be given
the power to transmute her into flawless stone,

with all her beauty untouched as she was once,
too slight for woman and too wise for child,
caught by the pitiful artisan in bronze
as she held out her hands to life and smiled."

" Come, John, it isn't safe for us to dwell in
the dream of our youth. Remember, *autres mœurs*,
and, when your heart is breaking for your Helen,
reflect that she also has a right to hers.

' *O mihi si redeat* '—but all that's finished,
(Do you remember, ' to be always so ' ?).
For the two men and all their age have vanished
with the College cedar and with last year's snow :

Some day, when our work's done,
if we go to Paddington
and ask them to book us back
half way through the almanac,
the clerk will give us a ticket
for Oxford, but just as they snick it
' Stuff, stuff, stuff, stuff
and nonsense,' the engine will puff,
and shake with laughter, and run
two old fools out of Paddington.

And whether or not the creature's an impostor
(and there's the suicides of Jones and Sludge—
his mediums—to explain away) I'd trust her
to be at least as competent a judge

of what is right for her at one-and-twenty
as you and I, when, with our lives before us,
we heard Pelissier singing ' Ypsilante,'
with love and all the Muses for the chorus.

There are fewer things in heaven and earth, dear John,
than Shakespeare led Horatio to believe,
and one is Adam and the other one
is the greater perspicacity of Eve.

And whether Hamlet is private with a ghost,
or mad Ophelia whispers over the rue,
though both are equally betrayed and lost,
it is the woman who finds the thing to do.

And as to revenge, one thing in life is proved,
that at long last there is an equal danger
for those who hated and for those who loved,
for him who suffers vengeance and for the avenger."

" Forgive me, Peter ! I'm perfectly all right.
The trouble is that Sludge, the medium feller,
was found gassed in the kitchen on a night
when Helen was alone with Trodley in the cellar.

Coming upon the earlier suicide
of Jones, it isn't pretty. If they ask
what were they doing when the creature died,
Counsel will have a devil of a task."

" Then you must do it, John." " I, Peter ! " " You !
Consider ! the mere fact that you are pleading
will stop the mouth of gossip, and it's true
it's a good Counsel that the pair are needing."

" It's dead against my principles. Moreover,
if I succeed in clearing him, she'll merely
get rid of poor Devizes, and marry her lover ;
and I'll be saddled for life with Trodley."
" Clearly !

But that's the only way." " Peter, you're right.
I'll sink my pride and try to save her villain.
But listen ! they're there. She's kissing him good night !
Come in ! we were just speaking of you, Helen."

A

JONES

" He always was a little queer," she said.
" So like him to go sudden in a fit ;
hardly a penny left ! But there, he's dead.
He meant no harm ! I'll make the best of it."

So spoke the widow. Meanwhile, in the strip
of green they called the garden, the small statue
poor Jones had loved so, pinched his marble lip
with a cold smile that seemed to fly straight at you.

" One thing," thought Mrs. Jones. " That statue goes
to-night—the sniggering fool ! For Percy lay
tumbled against it, clutching, heaven knows,
the stone so tight he'd hardly come away.

Oh, you may laugh, you monkey ! Where's that hammer ?
I'll smash your grin " ; but in the darkened room,
reading the will again, sobbed with a stammer
his codicil, " The statue for my tomb."

" I won't ! I can't ! It isn't Christian !
Poor Jones was mad ! I'll smash it like I said."
She took the hammer. " Smash me if you can,"
the cold lips smiled. She ran away instead.

(Then night, a falcon, stooping to the kill,
struck swiftly at the shuddering garden. All
under the murderous wings was black and still,
save for a low, a distant hunting-call.

And then the moon came up, and with a level
stroke touched the smiling face. The wind it was
that thrilled the night—too sweet for flute, too evil
even for hunting-horns—the wind, because,

if it were not the wind, I must suppose
[and that were madness!] where no foot has trod
in evil beauty, darkly smiling, goes
[Christ save us all!] by night the garden god.)

B

SLUDGE

When I consider immortality
and the texture of our hearts, it seems to me
on those who claim it for us rests the onus
of proving we'll not suffer like Tithonus.
For if we carry with us, as we must,
the star of life that glittered in our dust
over the secret border, and the spirit
doth all that legacy of life inherit
—poor ghostly heir, who thus accumulates
the eternal load he cannot meet of debts—
then there's no quittance even in the grave
for the weary, nor the ending they would have—

love out, lights out, not even the lift of a feather,
but quiet, quiet, quiet altogether.
And will God cheat them of their peace? Nay, judge
yourselves how God would deal with one like Sludge.

Sludge, we'll suppose, was born in Dunchester
(or any other town you may prefer,
provided only that the town is one
whose civic motto is, "We get things done";
and where they build great chimney-stacks to cloak
the lovely things they leave undone—with smoke).
Between the Charybdis of riches and the Scylla
of poverty his parents leased a villa—
"The Larches"—in a long, tight-featured crescent,
the name a sort of dreary wedding-present.
And long before the wood began to rot
(and with it that green metaphor) they forgot
their hopes, their youth, and the larches whispering
in the gorse-gold circle of the wedding-ring.
But, though the lantern in the house grew dim,
when Harold Sludge was born, it blazed for him.
And for a little while it seemed to her
that Christ was born again in Dunchester—
not the Christ of the Book, a Hebrew stranger,
but her own Christ in her own secret manger.
What star, how lit, came with him? and what cry
as of "*Ecce ancilla domini*"
changed Sludge's parents till it made of them
a father and mother in Bethlehem?
Who touched their eyes with vision? and, alas!
who dimmed the vision and who let it pass?

Don't go to the church in the square to ask,
for the curate's engaged in the higher task

of teaching provincials to grasp, if they can,
how Jesus appears to an Oxford man,
and removing the crudities, by his manner,
of revivalist words like " God " and " Hosannah."
Don't ask the curate, who irons and starches
His life and His death, why Christ left " The Larches."
But ask of the butcher, whose little bill,
unsettled last visit, is owing still ;
and ask his employer if Sludge comes dear
at two hundred and twenty pounds a year ;
and ask the doctor if croup has a grudge
against the children of people like Sludge ;
and ask of the neighbours if they can say
when the Sludges last had a holiday ;
and ask Harold Sludge to work out the sum
of childhood and darkness and want in a slum ;
and ask mill-chimneys and the warehouses
where the light of the eyes they murdered is ;
and ask trams roaring through railway arches
where is the sob of the wind through the larches ;
and ask old Charon what his boatmen call
the black, slack flood of the viscous canal.
Yes, ask all these things, and the rain and the smoke,
how an insignificant spirit broke.
Yes, ask all these things, and the smoke and the rain,
if he wants it all over again and again—
the stunted life, and the hopes that were
embezzled, when Christ left Dunchester.
Then go, if you dare, where his tired feet trudge,
and say, " This will last for eternity, Sludge."

And that is the way the tale would have ended
if Harold had lived as I had intended—
another muddle (and why not one,

since every day sees a million ?),
another sparrow to add to the numbers
at the fifth of a farthing—that God remembers——

But, instead of that, I must ask you to come
to a drawing-room, where a medium
is rendering slowly, or, rather, is
failing to render two messages—
one from a lady, who had been so dear,
dark death was half entrapped in darker hair,
and the long day of her beauty added one
to the gold visitations of the sun ;
and from a laughing boy, who never knew
any worse pain than to be twenty-two,
and, when the bullet came, half shyly unfurled,
youth like an ensign in that unbannered world.
And Sludge—a medium from Dunchester—
felt for the hundredth time a message stir
deep in the roots of his spirit, and he heard
a word begin, too bright to be a word,
and almost saw, what man has never yet
seen, violet light beyond the violet—
felt, heard, and saw, and for one shining second,
as on a hill astonishingly beaconed,
with fire at night, a wisp of loveliness
cut at him with a wonder of a face
that changed his own ; and laughter touched his mouth—
mimosa in the winter of the South,
beauty and laughter—so bright he could not bear it,
and in the mistranslation of his spirit
that starlit lady was the wind whispering
through the lost larches of the wedding-ring ;
and that dead boy, who had adorned the dark,
spoke with the accent of a tired clerk,

and all that bravery and beauty were
lost in the rain and smoke of Dunchester.

Suppose there are such spirits, and suppose
beauty and youth endure, and kindle a rose
death does not pluck, because the petals have
so sure a scent they remedy the grave—
what is the answer for the soul that parches
where youth and beauty perished in " The Larches,"
and through eternal summers only knows
his own heart-broken image in the rose ?

What answer ? Nay, but if the man had spilt
his life, and draws death round him like a quilt
up to the chin, and settles fathoms deep
into his rest, will God deny him sleep ?

NEWSPAPER INTELLIGENCE

A

GOSSIP NOTES

I was one of the *invitées chez* Jim Trodley
last night at the ghost-cellar. My dears, too grim,
too psycho-analytically ungodly,
and altogether too divinely Jim.

Helen Devizes—as always, the *dernier cri,*
more Paris than the French (of course, you know
the brilliant girl of Crayfish, the K.C. ?)—
was doing the honours of the studio.

I understood from something Helen said
(*tout entre nous*) that " Jim " will be spooking less,
having unexpectedly inherited
property from his aunt. As to her dress . . .

B

CORONER'S INQUEST

Coroner said that he was satisfied
it was a normal case of suicide.
He thought it right, in view of what the widow
had said of Mr. Trodley, to add that no shadow
of blame attached to him. But, nevertheless,

his counsel (Mr. Crayfish) wished to express his client's practical sympathy, and to add that a suitable allowance would be made. Jury returned the verdict, with a rider suggesting that gas-ovens should be wider.

" What is this love of yours," said the
princess.
(" Let down your hair ! Unfasten
the gold rope ladder to the stars !
Rapunzel, hasten ! hasten ! ")

" Rope ladder for a thief," said the princess.
" What is this love you swear ?
how born ? how cherished ? " (" Rapunzel,
let down your golden hair ! ")

" Let down your hair, Rapunzel,"
" Whence do you come, dark lover ? "
(" From the broken gate by the garden,
where the alder-trees lean over.")

" What have I to do with the garden
and the cold trees standing there ?
I am better alone." (" Rapunzel,
let down your golden hair.

A bird in the dusky branches
plays her brown-throated flute,
whose notes are silver apples,
and gold forbidden fruit ")

" Apples and a brown bird singing.
What have I to do with these ? "

(" and the old low house, Rapunzel,
and the open lattices ? ")

" What is your name ? " (" Rapunzel,
my name is Dream-in-dusk,
and Quiet, and Fulfilment,
of all the heart can ask.")

" I am afraid." (" Rapunzel,
let down your golden hair,
for love and death are wingless,
and there is no other stair.")

III

MR. JUSTICE CRAYFISH AND THE BLASPHEMY LAWS

Argument

Mr. Justice Crayfish hears a case against a young poet — Stephen Jinks — of having published blasphemous verse. Counsel on both sides quote extracts from the poems in support of their contention. Mr. Justice Crayfish, on the Bench, has faint and disturbing memories of his youth, and particularly of one memorable night at Zweilutschinen, the culmination of a youthful tour in the Alps. Nevertheless, the judge sums up against the poet, who is duly found guilty.

For the sinner who turns
from his sin, no less
for the saint who renounces
his saintliness,

for all that confesses,
" It has not sufficed,"
the absolution of
Jesus Christ.

IN COURT

Mr. Justice Crayfish sits
alone and warming his five wits.
Counsel in their horsehair wigs
hoot like owls upon bare twigs,
gripping tightly on to law's
elm-trees with prehensile claws,
while their spirits through the slats
in their foreheads sag like bats.
Owls and bats, and all the heavy
birds of prey, through air of gravy
hover, tumble, stoop, and squirm in
search of variegated vermin,
while the crowd in court, as grey
as caricatures by Daumier,
look excessively like fungus
growing silently among us.
Suddenly between these noises
the most astonishing of voices
irrigates the poisonous gloom
of the fur-infested room
with water sprinkled through the rose
of some cool immortal hose.
Somewhere, can it be—oh, hearken !
on the road from Interlaken,
faint as cowbells, wild as wine,
dipped in snow and sweet with pine,
but as ruthless as the tiger
loveliness of Mönch and Eiger,
scattering with the pale typhoon
of her music and the moon
all that dim, that dark, that stale,
listen ! the Alpine nightingale !

Mr. Justice Crayfish shakes
his ruffled pinions, and wakes
to learn that what he really heard
was not, as he supposed, a bird
singing on a branch below him,
but counsel reading out a poem.

" M'lud," he finds him arguing,
" the simplest way, I think, to bring
this matter to an issue is
to read the so-called blasphemies,
and, after all the sound and fury
of me learnèd friend, to leave the jury
to judge upon the evidence
of their unguided common-sense.
I shall confine myself to quoting,
merely, where necessary, noting
at the appropriate time and place
the special points that prove our case.
And first I take as typical
the poem (your ludship) that we call
' Reflections on proposals made
with the object of reviving trade.' "

" I should like to have speech with those men
who say that peace and freedom will come again
when we have made
suitable arrangements about the revival of trade.
I shall say to these,
' What you call peace
is a graveyard near a battlefield, where an old crone
rubs one smooth bone against another bone,
and in the silly quiet of her stricken brain
hears a pompous voice say, " Not in vain
this thing, that was your infant, paid
the price of life for an increase in trade.
Write him this epitaph : ' He went
in order that investors might be sure of a safe fifteen
per cent.' " '

Bad taste, no doubt, but it is good
to be abominably rude,
when facts require a riding-whip
to make their hides of leather skip.
The poet sees those quiet faces
treated as a commercial basis
for business in that foreign field
by English blood to God annealed,
where the rich dead are not forgiving
the traffick of the richer living.
He sees these things, or thinks to see
intolerable blasphemy,
and would you have him say—politely,

' Continue, gentlemen, your sprightly
commerce in death and glory. We
achieved a famous victory,
and therefore allocate the shares,
the living to be millionaires,
the dead, for ever England, made
the flag that introduces trade,
and granted by the profiteer
two minutes' silence once a year.'

I shall say to these (as Christ might have said,
if anything so horrible had entered His head
as a civilisation which depends
for its justification upon dividends),
' You can make freedom sure
by handing over the direction of your companies to the
poor ;
and you can have the freedom you seek
by asking advice as to the conduct of life from the meek ;
say an old man who commits the offence of being alive
(and is sacked on that account) at sixty-five,
because your foreman insists that at his age
he is no longer worth the trade union wage,
and he says nothing at all unless he mentions
that, after all, there is " them Old Age Pensions." '
And maybe the foreman's wrong, and he is worth
(and thus achieves) the hard inheritance of the earth.
And you can have freedom if you will demand of the
Press
(and of yourself) honesty which is righteousness,
and resolutely exchange the jumble
of nonsense that you call your views for those of the
humble.

Here let me pause to indicate
that this, so far from preaching hate
or atheism, is a plea
for universal charity.
Nor is it anti-Christian
to argue passionately that man
cannot be said to ratify
the Treaty of Mount Sinai
until he takes into account
the Sermon on the other Mount.
Moreover, although satire scoff, it
demands no less 'What will it profit
a man to win the world, who loses
his soul?' because the poet chooses
thus to apply to knave and fool
the clinging leech of ridicule.

They are so blinded, these humble, that they do not
guess
that nothing in life is so successful as success,
imagining that it does not matter
to the soul if the body grows richer and fatter,
and, indeed, that delicate loveliness may miss you
altogether when wrapped in rolls of useless tissue.
They do not understand, alas! God damme!
that we don't want a lad fastidious as his mammy,
but the lad of push and go (as the business magnate
styles it),
who not only touches pitch, but actually defiles it.
Imagining—these humble—that it will hurt
whoever touches it, to finger dirt,
and that the feet somehow, that have not trod
in mud, unmuddied find the path to God.

Who have not learned that what is understood
to promote the survival of the fittest must be good,
and that the otherwise incurable jam in
the cities of the world is cured by war and famine.

This may be vulgarly dramatic—
that is a question for the critic ;
or indefensible as verse—
I leave that to the booksellers.
But whether a petal of a lily
negligently dropped by Shelley,
or (what it may be just as well)
an exercise in doggerel,
it is not (happily) your duty
to criticise æsthetic beauty,
but merely to decide for us
if beauty itself is blasphemous.
For, whether he succeeds or fails
the wish for loveliness prevails
upon the poet, and his aim
is not to injure nor to shame
the broken, but to crucify
the things that they were broken by.

Imagining—these humble—that it is harder
to justify mass-murder
than the occasional crime
of killing one man at a time,
for which, in self-defence, Society
has been led to introduce the gallows-tree.

And as for famine, as every leaf of every tree
is to the shape of summer necessary,
and as the green confetti of the beech
are counted by the autumn each by each,
lest one be wanting in the painted number
she stores for the gold wedding of September,
so in the pattern of that long peace
there is one need of all alike, say these.

They do not know that we are all such stuff
as bone and skin are made of, and that is enough,
and as for the business of the soul—thank heaven ! we
can
do without it, or leave it to the admirable clergyman
who assures that our handsome subscription to the
Sustentation Fund will wheedle
even the richest of us through the eye of a probably
imaginable needle.
Imagining—these humble—that the crass
body—a greater miracle than Balaam's ass—
in mere imperfectness points to the thought
of what is perfect, and itself thus naught,
needing so much, because it nothing hath,
stays at the soul—the angel in the path !
Imagining—these humble—that to die
is only to lay the body by,
as a man slips off his clothes to swim
naked in the sea, and the sea covers him.

Blasphemy ? But the Lord of peace
goes all in iron with such as these—

to be a shield against the spears
of sentimental profiteers,
who are prepared to merchandise
in Lear's heart and Gloucester's eyes,
but do it on the urgent plea
of patriotic necessity—
to be the buckler and the casque,
when, in the ever-deepening dusk
of fear and prejudice and hate,
Satan—the Hun—is at the gate,
and men see only by the lies
smouldering in each other's eyes,
to be his buckler, helm, and standard—
and when his armies have surrendered
to be the ensign of the Lord
of peace, descending as a sword.
Blessèd be the humble and the meek,
and blessèd they who dare to speak
proudly in their behalf, and prove
that in the cruelty of love
salvation lies, and it is thus
that God Himself is blasphemous.

But this one will say, ' My son
is among those who have gone.
Have I and other fathers suffered this
only to be tortured by your blasphemies ? '
And I shall reply :
' Not mine, but yours, the blasphemy.
It is not I, but you, that assess your children's sacrifice
in the terms of the Rate of Exchange and the current
market price.'
And I shall say to these :

' You cannot traffick in peace,
and you cannot quote it as priced
in the Stock Exchange list. For Christ
(or whatever name is given
to the secret kingdom of heaven
in which we are and have
this shadow of life, that shadow of the grave)
to those who remain has said,
" Leave the dead to bury the dead ! "
Rich though they be, you cannot sell
or buy their miracle,
nor be enriched by it, nor in Jerusalem,
sweet with the bugles blowing over them,
set up your market-place and have increase—Not thus
comes peace,
nor freedom thus. But, slowly
making more holy what is holy
from the guarded pool
of the spirit, swift, cold, and beautiful,
in mists diaphanous his rain
a god draws back again ;
and, as the sun builds with the clouds, of these
he builds his city of peace—
those stoneless streets at whose sweet end
friend meets with friend,
those star-hung towers in which the light of the sun
with the moon's light is one,
and love as visible and exquisite
as the little lamps with which the yew is lit,
so luminously red in the translucent green
of that deep air the lanterns of love are seen—
and the music of meeting and the trumpet at the gate
sounding, " All ye who enter here, abandon hate." '
Thus freedom comes, thus peace,
I shall say to these."

My learned friend will not expect
a British jury to be tricked
by eloquence, which would be rant
even if it were relevant.
What are the facts? Here is a sheaf
of verses written in the belief
that to be violent and Russian
is clearly the prevailing fashion,
that honour as the English know it
is not good business for a poet,
that the war-satiated public
need their heads hitting with a niblick
if they are to be moved or notice
any contemporary ditties.
And therefore, watching the main chance
with stern poetic common-sense,
this young man sets himself to be
the laureate of blasphemy.
That being so, the question for
your judgment is not whether war
is murder, varied with a scene
staged in a verminous latrine,
with all the ardent sacrifice
of youth a chronicle of lice,
and history nothing but a stench
crawling along a shattered trench,
but whether what has given offence
to countless decent citizens
(as we have shown) has been regarded
as journalistically sordid
by Sunday newspapers, denounced
(in consequence) by bishops, trounced
by all good sportsmen as preventing

a proper attitude to hunting,
and held to be a godless libel
by men who never read the Bible—
whether, I say, the book in fact is
a threat to all that Christians practise
(or preach), and must, it follows, be
burned by the hangman for blasphemy.
My learned friend adroitly quoted
a single poem. But be it noted
that this, though open to criticism,
is, in respect of atheism,
milk and water compared with such
an effort as " The Four-Ball Match."
And let me say while that outrages
religion, in his later stages
the poet—least of pinchbeck Neroes—
fiddles upon the grave of heroes :

THE FOUR-BALL MATCH

(SEMI-SYNCOPATED)

Arthur (" Jack ") Toplight, whose famous deal in shirts
was so damn clever that it fairly hurts,
sat drinking whiskey (Heavens ! What a chin !
Where all others leave off, he'll begin.)
Drinking whiskey,
    and bullying the waiter,
and winking to the waitress :
    " I'll be with you later."
(God takes a driver,
    one good whack !
[Keep on praying !]
    Good luck, Jack !)
Arthur's the fellow to tell the slackers off,
cursing at his office before he starts his golf :
" What the hell's the matter ? Make him pay ! "
Break him ? Teach him business isn't play !
Swinging from the shoulder,
and following it through.
Damn ! in the bunker !
Why will it slew ?
(God's in the bunker ;
    Ball won't run !
[Keep on praying !]
    Arthur's done !)
Says to his opponent : " I play five "
(Lord, what a liar ! Ten with the drive !)
Takes out his putter, plays for the hole,
misses it by fathoms, and curses his soul.
Goes on cursing
till he hits the pin.

" My honour, partner "
(see the caddie grin!)
(Devil takes a new one,
makes it roll
[Keep on praying!]
That's my soul!)
Arthur (Jack) Toplight three up at the turn:
" Never touched a single pound that I didn't earn.
Started as a bootshine—never looked back—
half the world are glad enough to have my boots to black!"
" Jack, you're looking poorly!"
" Never felt so well!
Caddie, tee the ball up,
and get out of it to hell!"
(Devil drives a long one.
Lands on the pretty.
[Keep on praying!]
Lord! what a pity!)
" Only one thing matters—getting on top.
Where's the beastly ball gone? Swear I saw it drop!
Haven't done so badly—at forty-seven;
never forgave a debt, nor ever was forgiven.
Who's the fellow standing
on the green? The devil!
Fore! are you deaf, sir!
Deaf or damned uncivil!"
(God lays a stymie.
Game's all square!
[Keep on praying!]
Hangs by a hair!)
" Queer how the light's gone! Really damned odd!
What's the name you're muttering? What's that? God!
How your voice is altered! Was that rain that fell?
I'll play to a finish, though the day's as black as hell.

Never was a quitter,
never looked back.
Who was that whispered,
'Stick it, Jack'?"
(God takes the brassie,
on the green, my son!
[Keep on praying!]
Dormy one!)
"Is this a foursome? We started out alone.
I'd have kept a stricter score if I'd known."
Playing for the last hole, nothing to be seen;
drive into the darkness, and chance the green!
"Too late to alter,
or learn a better stroke."
That was the last time
Arthur (Jack) spoke.
(God took a mashie,
laid the ball dead.
[Keep on praying!]
"Game," God said.)

But, not contented with the sensational
picture of God as golf-professional,
he then proceeds to write a series
of ultra-fashionable theories
on war, contriving at a stroke
to make the dead and God a joke.
I therefore read, though with reluctance,
what I can only call a muck-dance :

I

You think these plotted, those designed
the war with deadly craft—and some
made money out of Kingdom Come
on purpose ! Nothing of the kind !

God ! how much better such devilish
cunning than that ineptitude
which, like a slattern bringing food,
just slipped, and let the whole world smash !

II

But all you dear who died
and did not guess
you died for utter
silliness,
who did not know (how
could you ?) that
nobody knew what
they were at.
Be not amazed, you dear,
and have no shame ;
all wars and all their dead
have been the same.

III

What did you do in the Great War, Daddy ?
I hated mine enemy !
And what were you hating him for, Daddy ?
For being as great a fool as me.

IV

It wasn't England, it wasn't France,
nor even Germany,
that gave the hounds of hell their chance,
but you, my lad, and me.

Just plain dull fools, Jones, Brown, and Smith,
who stood about, while greater
fools than ourselves were busy with
betraying their Creator.

And by mere carelessness we slew
Christ with as black a stab as
the voice of any silly Jew
who cried, " Give us Barabbas."

V

Here in an English graveyard snore
the business men who won the war.
While by the foreign seas they crossed, it
happens, lie the men who lost it.

Gentlemen, it is not a trick,
believe me, only of rhetoric
to beg you to remember them
who clamoured at Jerusalem
for One, whose whisper mounted through
the roar, " They know not what they do.
Forgive them, Father." Not I have brought
the Son of Mary into court,
but, since the poet has ventured, you,
hearing " Who is on My side, who ? "
must make the ancient choice again :
" Who is for Jesus, gentlemen ? "

Meanwhile, thoughts like runaway fish
swim the mind of Justice Crayfish,
each one with a trail of shadow
crape behind it of a widow.
At Zweilutschinen by the bridge
there is no haven for the judge.
The meeting waters, black and white,
flow murmuring into the night,
carrying in their glacier stream
a boy who perished in his dream.
The Alpine nightingale long since
has crossed the rivers of romance,
and singing, clearer than a lute,
in that dim world where all is mute,
challenges with her golden breath
the ebon silences of death,
and as one shadow follows her
she sees—brown Orpheus—darkness stir,
and draw him for ever, looking back
into hell's fatal almanac.
Then everything in all his sky
is still, but cold and small and high
against the clouds a single smudge,
shaped like a vulture, warns the judge
that it is time to fasten his
talons in the carcases.
He hears his voice begin to snap
on the phrases of his summing-up,
closing with bars of steel upon
his own imagination.
Coldly and clearly he directs
the jury to observe the facts,
and to dismiss the eloquence

of prosecution and defence.
Motives were nothing. Therefore let them
disregard, if not forget, them,
and ask themselves the single question :
were the poems anti-Christian
in actual fact, and so designed
to contaminate the public mind ?
Upon the question of their fitness
for publication they had the witness
of churchmen, bankers, and the Press
condemning them for godlessness.
Also the jury must consider
that the case had given them a wider
public, and therefore must increase
the damage, if they were blasphemies.
They must not let themselves be swayed
by the appeals that had been made
to take into account the beauty
of the verse itself. It was his duty
to tell them, if this plea were true
(and as to that he had no view),
that the degree of active harm
varied inversely with their charm.
Defence had urged that the poet was
obedient to higher laws
of inner vision, and in their sight
his work was justified by right
of some immortal dream's dominion.
That was a matter of opinion,
but they (and here he snapped his jaw)
had no concern with any law
save that which, though the heavens shook,
was justice by the statute-book.
They must discount pleas made to them,
as wardens in Jerusalem,

by counsel on both sides. There was
no question of Caiaphas
or Pontius Pilate, but a plain
issue for British jurymen.
They must decide, and, if they found
the poet guilty, he was bound
to warn them that he took a grave
view of the ever-rising wave
of Bolshevism. The law was law.
The jury, duly warned, withdraw.

Guilty, of course ! But, Crayfish, who
is guilty, and of what ? Not you
surely, and surely you acquit
your youth of any share in it—
your youth and what the dreams in dark write
when arguing with Peter Arkwright ?
Leave Oxford, Helen (now called Trodley),
and concentrate on the ungodly
violation of the heart
by beauty's abominable art.
Turn away, and be assured
that youth's a fever can be cured ;
that love and vision, and the voice
of Philomel that broke a boy's
heart can be stultified by this
verdict upon blasphemies,
till there is nothing left at all
but youth at his own funeral.

That was the judgment, as I guess,
of bitterness on bitterness.
But, now it is spoken and finished,
let the judge forgive the punished,
and let the felon, if he will,
forgive a greater felon still.
For of all blasphemies the last
is to deny the Holy Ghost,
that watches with love-weary eyes
the angels sack their Paradise,
while he to whom his captain gave
the flaming sword to smite and save
whirls it about him as a levin
to blaze the sills of his own heaven.
O boy condemned, be very gentle
with those who in the night dismantle
their own immortal citadel—
the sin by which the angels fell.
Be very gentle, as though he were
your own especial Lucifer,
and you the heart in which he fell
the thousand parasangs to hell.
Be you his hell, and he your heaven,
and both condemned and both forgiven.

BOOK IV

THE END OF THE PATH

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Argument

Mr. Justice Crayfish has passed sentence of death on a man—James Jakes—who, having deserted his wife, has killed the husband of his mistress. This book starts at the coffee-stall which Jakes frequents, and shows a glimpse of him before the arrest. After that the book deals with the affair, after sentence, from the points of view of various people affected. There are first the reflections of the murderer's mother. Then the deserted wife is shown waiting for the verdict. Next there are two Press views, followed by an account of the murderer in his cell. Then the judge discusses the case over dinner with Peter Arkwright, and on the following day hears it discussed at a luncheon-party of his daughter's, where Stephen Jinks—now a friend of hers—has been reading. Later that night the mother of the murderer visits the judge at his chambers, with some vague idea of saving her boy. They discuss the case on completely different levels, till suddenly they both become aware of their own helplessness, and the futility of life and death.

BOOK IV

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It is easier to be angry than to pity,
  it is easier to condemn than to understand,
easier to find the Uncelestial City
  than the dim counties of the Holy Land.

I too have raged, I too have sullenly rated,
  I too have judged men, being judged by these.
And I have loved far less than I have hated,
  and was proud of this, like all the Pharisees.

Shall I not, therefore, now that the day is over,
  remember, if men sinned, that they have suffered,
come back at nightfall an unfaithful lover,
  who would not understand the love they offered ?

Shall I not see that to live is to have relinquished
  beauty to the sequestration of the dark,
and yet that the spirit of man, benighted, vanquished
  has folded wings, and shall use them as the lark

into the sun beyond the cold clouds flinging
  her desperate hope, not reaching where she has
    striven,
but soaring for ever beyond herself, and singing
  high above earth as she is low in heaven ?

Shall I not confess that mine own evil humour
  and not man's failure forged this black despair,

and, while I wept, high up the golden rumour
of the lark ascending fringed the quiet air ?

Oh, I will listen to that, and, when I falter,
hold up my hands above me in my blindness,
you ancient virtues, man's immortal shelter,
faith, and the courage to fail in all but kindness.

Hold up my hands ! And, while the battle sways
beneath the least of the watchers on the hill,
let me remember that, though my heart betrays
the cause of man, you are his angels still ;

that, while you watch, although the night descend,
you uphold it in your hands, like the silk woof
of some black Sultan's palanquin, and bend
it vastly over the head of man for a roof

powdered with stars, and with the moon for a lamp,
confronting God, rejoinder to the tomb,
giving the soul of man, though the last trump
blare through the curtains, the right to his own
room.

I

ENTOURAGE OF MR. JAMES JAKES

I

THE COFFEE-STALL KEEPER

The coffee-stall keeper
said to me,
" Life's all damned nonsense
s' far as I see.

Take sandwiches now !
They shout for butter
as though you could pick it
out of the gutter.

And 'ard-boiled eggs,
with coffee arfther,
and swearing the lot is
tasted with naphtha.

Then, after serving,
there's washing-up
('ere, Jim, take yer elber
out of yer cup.)

What was I saying ?
Oh, yes, you'd think
there was nothin' in life but
eat and drink.

I tell yer honest
I feel that sore,
I sometimes ask what
the stummick's for."

2

THE OBELIX

Somewhere near the Obelix,
from nine p.m. till half-past six,
Mr. Arthur Damage sells
egg and sardine miracles.
I never see a hard-boiled egg
but what I think of Polish Meg,
who, warm beneath the lighted shutter,
ate seventeen, too starved to utter,
and, when she'd finished eating, said,
" Sorry ! but food goes to me 'ead."
And then I think of old Jim's hand, which
flourished a double sardine sandwich,
and showed us plain—too plain by far—
the living image of the scar
the " wanted " poster showed : " Reward.
Two hundred pounds." And Arthur roared,
" Wot did I say ? That bloody nail !
you've ripped your 'and up." Jim went pale,
and looked round slow, as though he heard,
" That's 'im " ; but no one breathed a word.
Not so bad when you come to think
how few had enough to eat and drink.
And that's why I say that Arthur sells
egg and sardine miracles.

3

THE FUNERAL

I think I'll have a coffee-stall
behind me at my funeral
between the two black coaches, that
look like a parson's shovel-hat.
I'd have it rumbling spick and span,
like a red-painted bathing-van,
and bony Mike—of course—to draw it.
And Arthur Damage, when he saw it,
would say, " Ah, well, poor bloody Jim,
I dessay there was wus than 'im " ;
and, hearing the old villain curse,
I'd feel less lonely in my hearse.
And, seein' that the heavenly host
can't need me, they might let a ghost
escape (before the tombstone slams)
to haunt beside the beef and hams.

II

MRS. JAKES SENIOR

She has dusted the ornaments, rubbed down the
chairs,
pried into hidden corners with the broom
a thousand times before, but now she stares
as though she swept an unfamiliar room.

Nothing is changed or missing. The sun streams
on carpet, pictures, and her restless hands
as carelessly as gold, indifferent dreams
revisiting a sleeper. And still she stands

perplexed and waiting. From the busy street
the sounds of London's summer rise, the roar
of cabs and carts, the steady stammer of feet,
but she has often heard all this before.

And still it seems that something in the place
vexes, and holds her motionless, as though
Rembrandt had charged her quiet ruined face
with difficult beauty, and would not let her go.

A woman in a picture, she does not stir,
save now and then to twitch her bonnet-tape,
as though an old dead poet had written her
in broken rhyme, and she could not escape.

There are some late pale violets in a jar
that she is watching sideways, cold, uncivil

blossoms, that match her glances, stare for stare,
hinting at something old, and dark, and evil.

Her poor mind, coated with the grime of years,
bent with ignoble care, with want distraught,
crouches behind her slow, unconscious tears
that have the noble movement of a thought.

So patiently they fall, so without shame
or wish of hers, beyond the hope of Art,
so silently they flood her cheek, the same
that rose (it may be) in a slave-girl's heart,

when Agamemnon fell, and, while all those
laughed one to other, she in her alien tongue
cried that there was no summer for the rose,
that the great bow for ever was unstrung.

And no one knew nor cared. So these slow tears,
speaking with alien tongue, as though they were
in other lands addressed to other ears,
interpreted her heart and spoke for her.

III

MRS. JAKES JUNIOR

I

LOVE IN WARTIME

All day you have been setting lathe and drill,
  while all day long, in overall and cap,
between the screaming ratchets, never still,
  I plucked shell-bodies through the open trap—

huge silver cones that tumble from a fir
  alone upon a demon-haunted heath—
cones scooped to overtake the soldier
  with chemistry's abominable death.

Why must we work for death, belovèd ? See
  London (as though the dark were God's wide pity
for the small heart-ache of humanity),
  tower by tower dreams, an Eastern city,

black as the black enchanter's heart that made it
  in cubes of quiet, and quarried silences,
to be for all the passions that invade it
  the goal beyond the world of love at peace.

And look ! the wheeling searchlights, when they climb
  the moon's path over seas that have no wave,
guard with bright blades the Eden-gates of time
  one instant for the pilgrims of the grave.

Let us forget all that we do and baulk,
cast roughness, poverty, the griping chance,
be our pure selves, unspoiled by life, and walk
the first two lovers in holy ignorance.

See me, belovèd ! what I am—uncouth,
misled by doom, one among millions who,
planned to the image of some flawless truth,
are blurred by what they suffer, are, and do,

as you are blurred, belovèd—yet no less
in fear and dark and failure we are such
as, if we do not falter, loveliness,
if only for a lightning-flash, may touch

with craftsman's fingers, feeling for the line
on which our souls were planned, and, finding
it,
set on our lips and eyes the countersign
of souls admitted to the infinite.

Men are losing love for ever. Therefore now,
while the janissaries of death advance,
drawing their cloak across some lover's brow,
let us two love for all who die in France.

2

SEPARATION

There was no child. I have wondered—living alone—
if it is better so. Life in a slum
on one side against something of your own—
to spoil, or something beautiful to come.

Leave him to scramble for himself all day,
and see him small and dirty like the rest,
and in the end to have him go away
before I'd really had him. Is that best?

Besides, suppose some evening he had made
a movement like his father's, lifted his hand
with that cold grip. I should have been afraid,
chilled to the bone. Surely you understand?

—a hand with knuckles like a stale dead jewel
clutching a corpse's neck, and, when they found it,
it held so tightly that the tarnished cruel
edge bit the bone, before they had unwound it.

God! what a hand—not all the fatal flood
of death could wash it out, or make me whole.
It burns me like a cancer in my blood.
There will be finger-marks found in my soul.

And yet what is it makes you want a child,
sharp as an aching tooth ? It's very old,
that wish, but if I'd had one, and he'd smiled
when I looked down, I'd have had that to hold.

I could have said, when Jim went off to find
that other woman—the married one—the last,
that I was rich, and, since he'd left behind
the future, he was welcome to the past.

I could have done the little tiresome things
at which we scold—the washing, sewing, mending ;
have heard his lessons—figures and dates of kings ;
all that I could have had world without ending.

And then I see the glass—this wrinkled cheek,
this bulging dress, these black and broken nails.
What use for such, I ask myself, to speak ?
They keep the gold-haired prince for fairy-tales.

But if my soul inside were young and slim
(who knows what hides behind the body's dress ?)
he would have seen it, when I played with him,
and given me back my life's lost loveliness.

3

HER TEARS

So spoke her tears, or so I heard them speaking,
misleading them perhaps, but had I let her
say for herself the things her soul was seeking
in broken language, how had that been better?

Is it not true that words traduce the mind
as bodies are life's brutal veil to wrong
heroes and queens, or villains of the kind,
splendid in Florence, when Alighieri sang?

Is Helen less Helen because no Homer tied
a strand of her hair about the whole world's throat?
And has no second young Achilles died
for whom no second Grecian poet wrote?

Did never Moses see the Promised Land
from some mean attic ravishingly wink?
Nor kitchen-wench, losing love's Ilion, stand
to watch the topmost towers swill the sink?

These beautiful names are nothing. What remain
are a fair girl, a man who died, a tale
of common joy, and individual pain—
these, and the simple heart alone prevail.

4

TROJAN WOMEN

So let the tears resume to tell us how
there is nothing left of any words she spoke
but blossom scattered with the breaking bough,
the cadence broken when her own heart broke.
Nor read of fabulous women loved and fair
in Troy or Babylon, whose sorrow lingers
upon the bright and adventitious air
of beauty not their own, but their gold singer's.
Nor read of how, when daylight came and waking,
there were no birds, no flowers in their breast,
nor gentle dawn, but only midnight breaking
for ever in the dark remembered West.
Look on her broken hands, her eyes, her brow.
You need not read of Trojan women now.

5

THE FIDDLER

Life goes slowly, a leaf here a leaf there,
  days like brown leaves that are carelessly scattered
upon the wild wind, and mimick our grief there.
  Why did the heart think that anything mattered?

They lisp at the window, they stutter and sidle—
  laughter of schoolgirls, the workshop—church
    bells—
leaves in the fiddle, leaves at the bridal,
  leaves, only leaves, in the dark, and naught else.

" I love you," as brittle as " So let us part now,"
  loving, and hating, touch, mix, and dissever.
Leaves on the lips, in the hair, on the heart now,
  leaves, only leaves, to-night and for ever.

" You take this woman "—" to have and to hold you
  in sickness and sorrow." Be quiet, mad heart!
leaves on the altar, leaves that enfold you—
  " To hang by the neck—till death do us part."

Turn up the lamp! A newsboy is crying,
  " Battersea murder. The Verdict." Who grieves?
Leaves for my soul now, heaping and flying.
  Leaves for the world now, leaves, only leaves.

IV

TWO PRESS POINTS OF VIEW

I

THE CHIMES

MR. HARTLEY LEAVES "THE CHIMES" OFFICE

Dave Hartley yawned, toyed with his fountain-pen,
  mildly abused the printers down the 'phone,
looked at a proof, put the thing down again,
  and, frowning, read a letter of his own.

" Mind you," his mother wrote, " I know that Frances
  is a good girl at heart. All the more reason,
when she is running risks, to take no chances,
  and say the necessary word in season.

She will respect you all the more. A wife
  hates a complaisant husband. Let it slide
and you may both regret it all your life."
  " Damn ! " muttered Hartley, and tossed it on one
    side.

The proofs came in. His leading article
  dealt with the murder. " Callous and inhuman."
" These crimes of passion must cease." " The judge
    did well
  to say that he was sorry that the woman

was not before him, and that it was time
  that people understood where naked lust is
the cause, so far from lessening the crime,
  the greater need of unrelenting justice."

" Justice." Dave rubbed his chin. " Hardly the noun
I personally should have banked my soul on
for hammering a man when he is down.
More like revenge ! " He changed a semi-colon.

" I wonder should I scrap or let it go ?
He's paid, poor devil ; and suppose there were
more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
than the judge dreamed of. But ' Adulterer.' "

He read the word and paused. Crossed through a smudge,
and marked it " Press." Then sighed, " Of course it's stiff.
God ! how I loathe this kind of hanging judge—
self-righteous dolt. I would have scrapped it, if——"

He left the sentence uncompleted, rang
and sent the stuff to print. " That's that," he said.
He shut his desk down with a vicious bang.
" Now for a whiskey, and so home to bed."

.

The night, when he stepped out, with stars was clear.
Straight hung the moon's cold flare. The streets were wet
with her white dew, and clocks chimed on the ear,
cool in the distance as a clarionet.

Hartley looked round him. Behind prison walls
the world was dark, while here, a moonlit bell

in night's black campanile, high St. Paul's
worked in the mind some silver miracle.

" I've got to live," Dave grumbled. " Haven't I ?
And if I didn't write it, someone would.
Besides, in any case he's got to die."
And added loudly, " And he damn well should."

He tried another tack. " He had his fling
with his eyes open. It's on his own head ;
And, even if the law needs altering,
well, what about the other man who's dead ?

We can't think only of the man who kills.
And then the wife." He shrunk from that. " Damnation !
What's death ? " he cried. " To shuffle off the ills
that flesh is heir to—'twere a consummation."

" I stand by every word of it," he cried.
" I'm proud of it, I tell you. Proud ! I am——"
And hurried off to catch (since none replied)
on the Embankment the last workman's tram.

2

SECOND NEWSPAPER VIEW

SIR MAURICE TOWERS AT BREAKFAST

Over his breakfast, in a dressing-gown,
Sir Maurice Towers thought he might as well
look at the rag, by which expressive noun
he meant his Sunday sheet, *The Sentinel.*

Full as it was of photographic ads
of what is worst and silliest in the nation,
composed by peers who were, and wrote for, cads,
it had, of course, a million circulation.

Sir Maurice, therefore, as its owner, basked
among the topmost apples in the basket.
He gave his wretched public what they asked,
and, if they didn't, damn well made them ask it.

"What have we here?" He munched a bit of toast.
"Ten millions for the schools. Wasters again."
"Rape in Northumberland." "Delirious ghost bites constable." "Are writers gentlemen?"

Well, well, he liked his Sunday. The smooth table
in whose brown pool the dishes, like Narcissus,

dreamed on their silver image. (" Where is
Mabel ? "
he heard, and someone muttered, " Damn !
It's missus.")

" Ah, women, women ! " He smiled indulgently.
Poor things ! and yet it was the fact about them,
for all their oddities (he drank his tea),
the papers simply couldn't live without them.

Men needed action to make them interesting—
own horses, fly the ocean, murder Jews ;
but women didn't need to do a thing,
by merely being women they were news.

Look at his wife ! The smooth, delicious cat,
completely civilised ; but let the shepherd
who folds the passions turn his head, ears flat,
before he'd time to breathe, she'd pounce—
a leopard.

That was the savour of life. A woman's quarrel
(Mabel was being scolded !)—undergrowth
where the cat-beasts solve moral and immoral
by being neither, and by seeming both.

Not bad, by George ! None of these writing chaps
had half his wit or half his common-sense :
but then (he smiled luxuriously) perhaps
they hadn't had half his experience.

He went on reading. " Here's the latest murder.
Good Lord ! " he whistled, suddenly adjusting
his spectacles. " Absurder and absurder !
Old Crayfish must be mad. The man's dis-
gusting.

A judge's business is to judge, not lecture
the world on sins the old fool's not inclined to.
A stunt to get himself into the picture—
the Pharisee ! My God ! I've half a mind to

let the man know the public call the tune.
They pay a parson to be cursed or prayed for,
and, as they pay the judge, they'll very soon
be asking where's the justice that they paid for."

Sir Maurice leaned back in his chair. The word
" Adulterer " stuck in his gizzard. " Hell !
The most outrageous thing I ever heard.
A judge ! Who made him judge of Israel ? "

He took a pencil from his pocket, wrote,
and stopped with a wry smile. " Come off your
perch,
Maurice ! I guess I know what got your goat ! "
He tore the paper up and dressed for church.

V

JAKES

I

THE FIDDLER

Swing dark, swing death! You need no longer fear
the agonising day : the night is here.
No need to wonder now, and none to pray.
Prayer and the need of prayer have passed away.
Beat slowlier, heart ; be very gentle, breath.
Let all go softly now : swing dark, swing death !

Swing death, swing dark ! There is a curtain drawn
between the utmost midnight and the dawn :
Lay down your head, and, though the couch be shallow,
deep will the blanket be, and soft the pillow.
The dying taper quenches on the spark.
Lie down to sleep at last : swing death, swing dark !

Swing dark, swing death ! Now all accounts are paid,
all debts acquitted : be no more afraid.
Men have done all they can, their worst and best.
Find now in God, or in the darkness, rest.
Cease beating, heart at last, be quiet, breath.
It is all ended now : swing dark, swing death !

2

IN THE CONDEMNED CELL

History is a tale of murder. Crowns and kings
poise on the dagger's point. The greatest names
are those of men who did the foulest things,
or those who suffered most outrageous shames.

Red death is such a masquer that his friends
borrow a little of his high romance,
and when for all the rest the measure ends,
impeccably the bright assassins dance.

Think of their flashing names—Jael that slew
the sleeping king, Ægistheus lord in Greece,
or Roman Brutus that great Cæsar knew,
or Cosimo the Florentine, and Guise.

Then think of dungeons where the heroes rotted,
the rack, the oubliette, the hanging-cage,
the noose, the tumbril, and the sawdust clotted
with the last brightness of the Middle Age.

Think of all these—and how the others went
unmarked, unchronicled in any tale ;
and learn that man's most lasting monument—
and dearest, is the gibbet and the gaol.

And, so prepared, look on this murderer
Jakes, thus enrolled in the immortal corps—
the band of brothers—the happy few—who stir
men's minds like trumpets calling kings to war.

Jakes, who is sitting staring at the wall,
and plucking at his fingers while he sits,
unconscious of his noble doom, and all
manslaughter's individual benefits.

He does not call the gods in vulgar spite
to vindicate his helpless wrong. Instead,
knowing at law that two wrongs make a right,
and two deaths cancel, bows his uncomely head.

He sees death's shadow gradually crawl
toward him at a calculated pace,
and something of its slow, impersonal
dark has already passed into his face.

The little noose of light about him shrinks
from hour to hour, and still he does not stir,
and, when it grips at last, the warder thinks,
he will be very little quieter.

3

DEATH AND ADULTERY

Oh, who can plumb the soul of man ? Was this
loved and a lover once ; did these lips kiss
in the same climate where the lovers are—
Leander with his Hero, Abelard
or young Paolo ? With the same wild wonder
did he upon his lover's lips surrender
his soul, like theirs, in beauty yielded then
never to be their own, or vile, again ?
What in this quiet hulk, this evil dunce
of life, could set a woman dreaming once
of London like a black enchanter's city,
dark as the fate of man, wide as God's pity,
and drawing to the light to some low tune,
as tides with the long magnet of the moon ?
Or what could light a second perilous flame,
though with a smoky radiance, still the same
high fire, whose gold hung in the London trees
Eve's apple in some false Hesperides ?
He could not then—he will not tell us now—
what passing vision touched and changed, nor how
the love, for which he would not longer ask,
stretched to a gross Thibetan devil-mask,
with huge puffed cheeks and tumbled-open
mouth—
love that came from the sea with birds in the
South,
love with her doves about her, how she shut
the golden cage, and trailed a draggled slut
in the streets of the world, how love in hands,
though slim,
that juggled the round world, had died for him

with no flutes playing farewell, nor music over
the water for Aphrodite or the lover,
no fiddles beautifully hushed for her,
but only death and the adulterer.

4

A THIRD PRESS VIEW

The world goes on outside. No paper flinches,
however much the case may pain or shock it,
from giving it the space in feet and inches
dictated by its public and its pocket.

Some organs thank their God they and their readers
are not as Jakes. Some, with a pleasant air
of genuine surprise, say that the leaders
briefed for the Crown were positively fair.

Some publish photographs of streets and places
in which Jakes might have lived but didn't, some
invent long interviews with men whose faces
suggest they were (unfortunately) dumb.

But this is brief (however creditable
to readers who, when such events occur,
are angry with the papers, if unable
to watch them vivisect the murderer).

Some new sensation will be found to harrow
the public in the morning, when it wakes.
To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow
perform their usual services for Jakes.

A charwoman may grumble in an attic,
his sweetheart mope till she has found another,
the Judges of Appeal with automatic
impartiality uphold their brother.

The world goes on. Sir Maurice gives a dinner
and asks the judge. Dave Hartley buys his wife
a pair of garnet ear-rings. But the sinner
is left to salve his conscience with his life.

5

THE FIDDLER

VIATICUM

So leave him dark and speechless in his cell,
and ask your own articulate God to tell
how this that was a child dies choked with some
abominable dark viaticum,
that paralyses before it strikes to kill
the drugged and saturated heart. And still
remember this, though broken, changed, and spoiled,
was a man once, who suffered, loved, and toiled ;
had known (half-consciously) how dawn begins
with violets and the dappled leopard-skins
of orchis, and, before the sun can brush
his wing, the tiny bugles of the thrush
(those trumpets very like a daffodil)
that sound réveillé when the world's all still.
Not only this, but when his youth was hot
he might have held à spear for Lancelot ;
he might have known, like any other lad
(or knew perhaps), the heart of Galahad.
And now this gross, but no less pitiful, shape
in the shadow, reaching forward, of the ape,
this heart trapped in the body like a pit,
this soul that saw itself, and died of it,
this page that life has scribbled and Fate torn,
and all the beauties born or left unborn,
the many that were not, and the few that were,
blot as the judge pronounces " Murderer."
" May God have mercy on his soul " ; No doubt
since by his death he wipes men's mercy out.
He sinned, and you have slain him for his sin.
Judge, if Jakes enters, will you enter in ?

VI

THE JUDGE

I

OVER THE FIRE

" ' The Bear ' at Zweilutschinen ! It is strange
that you should mention it to-night. (The Beaune
is heavy, don't you feel ? I think we'll change.
Their Nuits is better). There's the little stone

terrace I was remembering at the place,
from which you hear the rivers white and brown
pour
to meet below the bridge, and, joining, race,
swollen that year with a month's steady down-
pour.

What year ? A long time since. So long in truth
it seems, as though it were a thing I'd read,
something in someone else's careless youth,
some boy I never knew or who is dead.

The rain had stopped the night I mean at sundown.
(I was at Interlaken). I set out
hearing a million Alpine streamlets run down
the cloud-wrapped hills that walled the path
about.

But suddenly the mists were ripped asunder
by two great hands, and in the space laid bare—
no mountain, but a clap of lovely thunder,
Jungfrau all gold in twilight took the air.

Then round a bend some Alp, as darkness fell,
hid her from view, but still the valley was cool
with her great presence, though invisible,
and with her secret night was beautiful.

In the small garden under trellised leaves
there's a long bench and table at ' The Bear.'
They set a lamp out on such summer eves,
and a stray guest may eat his supper there

of eggs, goats' cheese, and wild wood-strawberries,
as though he were a traveller in a song.
The valley was quiet save for the long hiss
of water and the cowbell's gradual gong.

A single guest upon his elbow leaning,
breathing that beauty, might have sworn (who knows)
that life in such cold loveliness beginning
should never lose the accent of the snows,

should have some kinship with the hills that took
the cathedral roof of night and held it, drawn
from peak to peak, and have the river's look
on its dark road, but the road's end is the dawn.

That single guest upon his elbow leaning—
(Do you remember, Peter, how I said
on Staircase Number Three, when I was meaning
to be a writer and chose the law instead :

'I am not afraid of judging. When the mist is
cold in the fields, who can answer for the day?
But when the sun is up the path of justice
runs broad and golden as the Pilgrim's Way.')

Peter, I thought of that, and, thinking, wondered
how would it have looked, that dim and
dreaming face,
if it had known that the goal to which it blundered
was to give sentence in a murder case.

The poet, whom I tried for blasphemy
(a friend of Mary's now, like all the lees
of literature), says if you cut one tree
you lay the axe to a whole world of trees,

and who would be a woodman with that burden
upon his soul on hushed midsummer eves,
when the south-west intimidates the garden
with the first hint of autumn and dead leaves.

Down with the tree, say I, whate'er it may cost,
and smash society's *delirium tremens*,
and so admit the air that they have lost,
and the open sky and the stars again."

"I demens!
Still carrying the Alpine standard, John,
and still impossibly too far to see

the lemon-trees that we have never known,
and the untrodden plains of Italy."

" Peter, what then ? Surely the law's the law,
nor was there room for doubt or for mistakes.
As for the man—the worst I ever saw.
The world, believe me, is well rid of Jakes.

Youth might no doubt have chosen, if it could,
a different fate that night beside the bridge,
but if there's nobody dares cut dead wood,
I'll bear it proudly like a king's privilege.

But you look tired, Peter. I've talked too much."
" Oh, no, it isn't that ; but when I'm gone,
I shall be thinking that you were not such
at Zweilutschinen and at Oxford, John."

2

MR. JUSTICE CRAYFISH SLEEPS

Night in New Square, Lincoln's Inn.
Tall gates closed. All's safe within.
Calmly sleeps (as well he may)
In his Chambers, Crayfish J.

Jakes may toss and Dave protest.
White hands crossed upon his breast
lies his lordship, with the grave
steadfastness that statues have.
Brow ! You see the sculptor plan it.
Marble ? Bronze ? Of course not. Granite !
Bitter stone ! But watch him knock its
grain in sparks to dig the sockets
deep, so deep the eyes lie dark.
Here the mallet left its mark,
smashing the nose out of the rough,
and leaving it as good enough :
indeed, preferring that the bone
should seem to struggle out of stone.
And then the jaw ! He hammered this
specially for death-sentences !
(see the way the teeth are gripped !)
Mouth ! Ah, there the chisel slipped,
or was it when he came to fashion
the lips, the sculptor had compassion,
and built a haven for the small
soul that was hid behind it all ?

Meantime sleeps (as well he may)
calm in darkness, Crayfish J.

Outside, moonflakes drifting heap
in the garden fathoms deep.
Deep ! What pool's as shallow ? Yet
night's black navy (dreams) may set
shadowy sails on this small sea
from Gramarye to Gramarye.
Let Mr. Justice Crayfish sleep !
Moonflakes settle fathoms deep,
while dreams (black swans of midnight) swim
out of taste and touch of him.

VII

THE GREAT WORLD

STEPHEN JINKS READS AT MRS. JIM TRODLEY'S

Mrs. Jim's poet was obviously nervous,
fluttered his pages, gasped, and fidgeted.
" Is that the man ? Charming ! But, Lord
preserve us !
He'll smash that bottle " ; which he promptly
did.

" The maids will see to it," cried Mrs. Trodley.
" Please, please don't worry." The poet held
his breath,
looked at his noble audience, muttered oddly,
and shouted suddenly, " I call this Death ! "

DEATH

The first is the story as I have heard it:
the second's the way I should have preferred it.
The first is the fact : the second the fiction.
God and the reader, make your selection.

i

A certain painter (what was his name,
Lawrence or Millais ? It's all the same.
I mean, the man who begins with Art
and ends with daubs of the great and the smart)—
let's call him X (for God, after all,
must content Himself with a numeral
when He tries to ticket the millions
of the creatures who call themselves His sons—
so the poet than God will go one better
by allowing his creature the use of a letter).
X thought that the visible world would break
into spears of light for Society's sake,
nor saw behind broken lights the light
in which all colours beat one great white,
nor felt beyond shadows the steady shade
that does not move—and X was not afraid.
He took his pencil out and his brush,
and he heard the Universe whisper, " Hush !
Behold the Master ! " so still, so still,
he could almost hear one daffodil
sway in the clump of grass by the easel,
till a rabbit shrieked in the teeth of a weasel——
Well, X was a manly sort of creature,

and he merely said of the rabbit, " That's nature."
But, as touching himself and the beauty that rode
where the rabbit was butchered, he thought,
" That's God."
His later productions (*vide* the Press)
were a triumph of British tenderness,
which his critics maliciously call the habit
(but don't mind them!) of ignoring the rabbit.

ii

There was a painter whom we'll call Z,
whose heart was always too much for his head.
His painting was faithful but undramatic,
and he died, as such painters should, in an attic.
Take, for example, this proof of his spirit
which shows him an idiot, or something near it.
That day Z watched the unfrequented sun
whisperingly solicit the heaths, as one
who, after separation, feels the warm
heart at his heart in the belovèd's arm.
And beauty, that comes but once and lingers,
less than a heart-beat touched his fingers
and breathed, as a girl might, leaning over,
" Take me, oh, take me and keep me, my lover! "
And the world grew so still, so deep the hush,
you could almost hear the stroke of the brush,
you could almost hear, deep down in the grasses,
the far sweet foot that had trodden Parnassus ;
you could almost hear, growing fainter and fainter,
Pan call to Apollo, but our poor painter—
he heard the rabbit caught by the weasel,
and tore up his canvas and broke his easel.

But when he died, the invaluable Press,
true to its motto " *De mortuis*,"
included our painter in the list
as " Z, better known as a Pacifist."

The poet stopped, hearing the gentle twitter,
" Delightful," rolled his papers in a bunch,
and followed Mrs. Trodley with a bitter
smile, as the butler summoned them to lunch.

LUNCH AT MRS. JIM TRODLEY'S

The poet's partner, Mrs. Seymour-Nashes,
smiled at him through the charcoal on her lashes :
" You know, I live for verse. My friends all tease
me.
They say I'm mad. (Now, if you want to please
me,
just let me babble. Don't you talk or fuss !
I know the way to treat a genius !)
And that last poem—it was too wonderful !
Did you see Helen (Mrs. Trodley) pull
her powder-puff out in the second verse ?
Nothing—only a nervous trick of hers.
But still, I could have cried. A poem to me
is sacred. Don't you feel that poetry
is somehow different ? But of course you do.
(But eat—or you will have me scolding you.)
But you are terribly bitter, aren't you ? Mystic,
I tell my friends, and wickedly sarcastic.
I wonder how the judge would like the poem ?
Let me see, didn't Helen say that you know him ?
If not, you ought to. He's a perfect dear ; it
would be so nice if you would let him hear it.
Helen, my dear, I was saying to Mr. Jinks
that he must read your father his poem. He thinks
(from past experience) that the judge has heard
all that he wants. But that I'm sure's absurd.
You'll make him read it, won't you ? "
" Hardly, Jane !
My poet doesn't need me to explain
that I loved the poem, like everything by him,
but, after a murder-trial, what is grim

worries my father. So please let's stick to golf
or anything to head the old dear off
the wretched case. I don't know why it is,
he's always bothered by death sentences."
" And very creditable too," observed Lord Bliss.
" Look here, young fellow, I'll tell you how it is.
When you're as old as me you'll save your breath
for praising life, not whooping over death.
Not that I didn't like it—very smart,
but, as our Yankee friends say, ' Have a heart ! ' "
" But——" stuttered Jinks. Nobody listened.
" Queer,"
said Mrs. Croad, " did you observe, my dear,
the way the fellow swung from foot to foot
but never moved his eyes ?—an ugly brute.
But what was that the judge said about mercy ? "
" Only a form of words," said Harold Purcey,
the eminent King's Counsel. " Champagne cup
for me." " Of course, I think the summing-up
was perfect," said a voice, " and so impartial ;
they'd simply got to find him guilty." " Martial
law is the stuff to give 'em, and give 'em quick."
The poet by an effort wasn't sick.
He closed his eyes and ears to all the noise.
When he recovered he heard the same harsh voice
shouting, " Reprieve ? Of all the damned un-
godly——"
(" Wine to the colonel," murmured Mrs. Trodley.)
" That sort of chap is what the halter's for.
Reprieve, indeed ! I'm sorry if I swore :
But really, Mrs. Trodley, when such fudge
as mercy's mentioned—— Oh, good morning,
judge."

" So that," the judge reflected, " is what the case
meant.
I wonder—God, I wonder ! " In the basement,
a new char washed the dishes, and said naught,
however much she may have felt and thought.
But presently she stopped her work and listened.
" The judge," she heard cook say. Her dull eyes
glistened :
" Wot judge, if I may arsk ? "—speaking the way fish
gasp in the air. " Wot judge ? Why ! Granpa Cray-
fish,"
cook answered, adding suddenly : " Look out !
Don't 'old that china teapot by the spout.
It's worth a lot, that is." " Does 'e live 'ere ? "
the char demanded. " In this 'ouse ? No fear !
That wouldn't suit 'er ladyship—not much.
Cocktails and cards and 'er young men, and such—
'e'd let 'er 'ave it, if 'e knew." " That shows,"
the butler said, " 'ow wrong you are. 'E knows
all right, 'e does, for all 'e looks so smugly.
It's plain to me that when he spoke so ugly
in sentencing that chap—the murderer—
that stuff on modern 'abits—'e thought of 'er."
Nobody (fortunately) watched the char,
nor noticed, when she asked " Does 'e live far ? "
how her voice trembled. " New Square, Lincoln's
Inn,
'is Chambers is, but why d'you arsk ? " The thin
fingers gripped tightly on the teapot handle :
" I always was a one," she said, " for scandal."

4

OUTSIDE MRS. TRODLEY'S HOUSE

" O God ! the brutes ! " The poet stood a minute
cursing the house and everybody in it.
Then, turning sharp, and looking straight ahead,
bumped into someone, and before he'd said,
" I'm sorry," heard a voice like a deaf midge :
" You've never been at luncheon with the judge ? "
" Good Lord ! It's Mrs. Smith," he said—the
name
he used for all the chars in turn who came
to cook his breakfast, dust and bivouac
belowstairs with the cat. " You walking back ?
Let's go together." The woman almost smiled
(he meant it, too—the funny, serious child).
" You are a one," she said ; " but, if I might
arsk, did you find his lordship was all right ? "
" Find him ? I didn't find him. He was out.
There was a little frightened man, about
three inches high. The other one—the big
fellow—he'd left behind him with his wig.
He was the only person in the place
I didn't want to hang, and in his case
the job was done already. But why d'you ask ? "
The woman's face resumed its sullen mask.
" Nothing," she said, adding to her denial :
" I see 'is picture in that murder-trial."
" Good God ! " he cried. " I thought I'd finished
with
the beastly thing. Now look here, Mrs. Smith,
leave murder to our betters ; they're the sort
whose natural environment is dirt.

The lowers orders simply are not fit
even to think, much less to talk, of it.
Our hides aren't thick enough." " Yes, sir," she
said.
" You won't be in to-night ? " He shook his head.

VIII

THE JUDGE AND MRS. JAKES

I

THE FIDDLER'S TUNE

What was it that the fiddler played
somewhere in Bermondsey, and made
the sodden rows of brick, like some
Satanic model of a slum,
break into leaves ? What music drew
a green, deliberate avenue
about her, till the listener stood
deep in a legendary wood ?
What ancient use, what lovely fashion,
of twinèd sound renewed the Thracian
bird, and for thoughts by squalor misted,
for words from pain's dark beauty twisted,
with luminous agony, had sung
the heart articulately wrung,
the darkly tortured mind made free
of sorrow's quiet majesty ?
What was it that the fiddler played
behind Trafalgar Square, and made
St. Martin's Bells on either hand
dissolve the nightmare of the Strand
into a mountain-path ? What summons,
brighter than oranges and lemons,
through time recalled the wanderer
between the torrent and the fir,
to see with youth's unclouded eyes
the sentinels of Paradise,
with the sun's torches raised on high, light
Jungfrau in progress through the twilight ?

A one-stringed fiddle at the street corner
and blunt black nails that pluck the bow.
What is the tune ? He will not answer.
Even the fiddler does not know.

His draggled feet are in the gutter,
oh, golden head, oh, feet of clay,
when nothing but the tune can matter
is there no other tune to play ?

Where are the notes (he does not listen),
here the thrush-chord and there the lark—
the wings that made the morning hasten,
and must you plunge them into dark ?

We too were such. Oh, let the ending
restore, remember, and retain.
The traffic roars. Uncomprehending
or deaf, he plays the tune again.

2

FOG IN LINCOLN'S INN

There was a fog that night. The judge walked back,
fighting against his memories. And still
Jungfrau, out of the sullen brown and black,
bloomed in his mind like a tall daffodil.

You know how daffodil, of all blooms created,
is like spring burning to a single flame,
and she all winter in the snow has waited
for the first thrush to thrill her English name.

And out of the brown dust, drawn by the cool
pipe of the winged enchantress, in a holy
quiet she greens, she glows, she sweeps her full
brocade of golden flame, and curtseys slowly.

Choked with the fog, he thought how Jungfrau kindles
with the cold flame of the flower, her sheath broken,
and the clean air pours up, and the world dwindles
like silence after a loved voice has spoken.

He thinks of his tall Alp. Without, within,
the London fog furred, like the wing of a bat,
hangs by webbed feet, and stifles Lincoln's Inn
with clammy leathern wings and streaks of fat.

He climbs the stairs, unsports his oak, and passes
straight to his bedroom. Then, in dressing-gown
and ragged bedroom slippers, with his glasses
catching a gleam from the fire, settles down.

A book lies on his knee. He turns it over.
His eyes and thoughts are otherwhere. He scans
the quiet room, as though it might discover
his secret, or perhaps some other man's.

The law-books have an unfamiliar air.
His dead wife's photograph is different.
The faces in the college picture stare,
as though they wondered vaguely why youth
went.

He lifts the book and drops it. The fire smoulders,
drugged with a tongue of fog. The crawling
damp
creeps through the curtain, striking at his shoulders,
and makes a blur about the reading-lamp.

He shakes himself, and tries to read his novel,
but doesn't see what he is looking at.
Like black Arabian slaves, fog-shadows grovel
about his feet. He dozes—— What was that?

A knock at the outer door? Who knocks so late?
No step was heard. He pauses in a stride.

Was it imagination ? Surely ! Wait !
The knock again ! What stranger waits outside ?

Danger ? Oh, nonsense ! But it's nearly midnight,
and the queer grope of fingers—was it human,
that wandering tap that touched, and shook, and
slid—night
and a ghost ! He rushed at the door. A woman !

He almost laughed in mere relief—the bonnet,
the beaded cape, the rusty skirt, the nod
of the poor wrinkled face with nothing on it
but work and years, and dirt. A ghost ! Good
God !

A bedmaker ! " What do you want ? " he said.
" It's the wrong staircase. In the fog mistakes
happen like this. Good night." She shook her head.
" No error, sir," said she. " I'm Mrs. Jakes."

THE JUDGE MEETS MRS. JAKES

The judge half made as though to sport his oak ;
then saw how the chapped hands beneath the cloak
quivered and shook, and how the tumbled face
was like death staring in a looking-glass.
" Meanin' no 'arm," she muttered, " thought I might,
arsking your pardon, and it bein' night.
I got a paper wot I wrote." She drew
a crumpled sheet out of her bag. " I knew
it should be wrote," she added with dim pride.
The judge made up his mind. " Well, come inside ! "

IX

MRS. JAKES MEETS THE JUDGE

I

THEY MISS ONE ANOTHER

What do they see, these two on opposite
sides of the chasm, and trembling over it
only the shifting, unsubstantial bridge
of words between the woman and the judge?
What can they see, unless they strip their eyes
of custom, darkness, and the daily lies
of class and habit? He must seem to her
not an old man, but something sinister,
alien, and static, by some ugly spell
of wealth and fortune inaccessible,
not fashioned of blood and flesh and tears, but moulded,
a judge's statue, standing with arms folded
in a City square, not living nor yet dead,
but hands, lips, cheeks and sightless eyes all lead.
And she an indecipherable scrawl
scribbled by life, in passing, on a wall,
smudged by the rain, stained by the falling grime,
surviving by the negligence of Time,
if tragic only with a lost inhuman
grief, as though what was minted for a woman
was so far changed that, even when she wept,
God could not hear her, and the angels slept.

Then let us show them as they really are
each to the other, not a judge and char,
but each the equal prey of circumstance,
sharing the common enmity of chance ;
he by hopes dying, she by hopes born dead,
equally spoiled, impoverished, misled ;
he with success denying its own name,
she in her failure pitiably the same,
he by what raised him, she in what she fell,
as little or as much remarkable ;
as little, since to hope and fail's as common
as to be born and die a man and woman,
as much because, despite Fate's utmost malice,
they are the broken bread, the wine, the chalice,
the priest, the altar, and the arch whose curve is
the symbol of a more than Roman service
in a greater shrine than Peter's Vatican—
the *nunc dimittis* of the soul of man.

3

THE BROKEN BREAD

" This thy child." How has any woman prayed,
when for her only son the rite begins,
where the hangman's hands upon his neck are laid
for the unmystical washing away of sins?

What can she plead save love and ignorance,
what urge except that, broken and defiled,
a gambler's loss upon a desperate chance,
this dangerous animal was born her child?

Time is not real. The faces shift and melt
from this to that, the babe, the boy, the man,
but each one equally the pulse she felt
hot underneath her heart when life began.

" Oh, you are great," she thinks; " you judge and sit
like God above the world with calm, pale eyes,
and look on life, and look away from it,
while something more than human judgment dies."

It is not easy to speak for the urgent flesh
that cries, " I burned, I suffered, and I made,
and what was born of me was young and fresh,
and fearless as life's self is unafraid.

Look ! it was part of all the things that are.
There's not an Alp but felt its neighbourhood.
No blade that thrust, nor bird that sang, no star,
no heart that beat but saw that it was good.

And this you spilt," says flesh, " and all the morrows
of sap, and song, and light, and what heart plans.
And will you say to Him who counts the sparrows,
not His to save and spend the wings, but man's ?

Will you be sure that I who plead and mutter,
bent, useless, weary, half-articulate,
may not be heard in heaven when you batter
in vain with hands beseeching at the gate ? "

All this is in her wasted cheeks, her hands
that clasp and tear, her unremarkable eyes,
a charwoman, who does not guess she stands
as terrible as Life at Death's assize.

What are the words the judge can hear ? " I meant
no 'arm in coming ! " " Sit down, sit down," says he.
" Since in a manner of speakin' 'e's innercent
of what you bin and called adultery.

It's something different like. It's 'ow things comes
(you couldn't know, not ever 'aving seem them

to them as lives in what you'd call the slums,
and brings a sort of bitterness between them.

Say ! she was tired of washin', scrubbin', cookin',
and tole 'im orf, and 'im all tiredness
come 'ome to 'er, and she in slippers lookin'
like a bundle of rags, dropped in a 'awker's mess.

And 'im perhaps, seeking for wot 'e'd seen
between the drinks, something 'e'd 'ad before,
something the beer brought back of what 'ad been,
and didn't find what 'e was looking for.

And 'oo's to judge the way in which she sor 'im ?
Say she was stood giving the chairs a rub,
'aving a little something 'otted for 'im,
and 'e come home all stinking from the pub.

And she 'ood stood there thinking, ' Stoopid lad !
This'll surprise 'im, this'll be a treat.
Why, bless 'is 'eart ! 'e isn't arf so bad,'
and then 'e tumbles in drunken from the street.

And something you mayn't know of in the law
turned over in 'er, and the beer went flat,
the steak all greasy, seein' what she saw,
and no more 'otting up, she thinks, for that.

Well, if she cursed 'im proper, was it strange ?
And if he leaves 'er, do you wonder, sir ?
When things go wrong, of course, men seem to change,
but would that make 'im an adulterer ? "

Life has not broken through. All that she said
wails round the judge's mind like a spent bird,
beating against a light, and falling dead
in the midstorm, unseen, unknown, unheard.

He makes no answer therefore to the loud
cry of the flesh, but, slow and haltingly
looking away from her, with shoulders bowed,
answers, as best he may, the spoken plea.

" God knows," he says, " it was not of my seeking
to judge your son, or to deliver sentence,
which by the formal words that I was speaking
condemned a soul to dark beyond repentance.

I did not seek the task, but when it came
I did but as I must. I could none other.
Were it to do again, it were the same."
He stopped, and a voice whispered, " This thy brother !

This that was flesh of thy flesh, bone of thy bone,
thou hast torn and riddled and broken. Is it well

with the child no more this woman's than thine
own,
and with thy conscience in the murderer's cell ?

Who gave thee life to break it in thy hand ?
Who made thee God's proconsul to loose and
bind ?
Who gave thee the vision of Christ to understand
the heart of the heart, the mind beyond the
mind ?

Answer ! For here thou judgest thine own case ! "
He tries for words, but speaks with such a broken
and stumbling utterance as in his place
some other, borrowing his voice, had spoken.

" And for each the end allotted," he is saying.
" For him that shadow, for me to share its shade
by casting it about me with the greying
mists of the night that my own heart has made.

I also knew, I also shared the light
of a boy's lovely shy companionships
with the morning of which he is the ensign. Night
falls on the forehead high and parted lips,

and in the dark he feels a figure moving
toward him, drawing nearer pace by pace,
and knows an end of youth and joy and loving
who, looking on old age, sees his own face."

But this he only thinks. Then, half aloud,
" There is one fate for all," begins to mutter.
" He killed, I judged. For both the equal shroud
drawn tightly by the same insane garotter.

And whether he chokes upon a rope, or black
with a clot upon the brain I tumble after,
the pail is empty both for Jill and Jack—
and both an equal source of children's laughter."

4

THE WINE AND THE CHALICE

So much they spoke, four persons and not two,
uncertain which was shadow and which cast it,
hearing the echo before the voice broke through,
seeing a face after the light had passed it.

Bright for an instant, a young man bids the swallows
bring back the Alpine dawn and the lost summer,
and, as he cries, the darkness of the gallows
beside his victim crucifies the dreamer.

Now an old woman pleads, and pleading cancels
her broken speech with phrases not her own,
but which she blindly reads, while sorrow's pencils
write on her heart what all such hearts have known.

The words with glaring headlights strike and clutch
two minds that hang suspended like a moth.
They swing apart, they circle, twine, and touch,
and in that instant something speaks for both—

something that each has added to the other
greater than the lender, of the borrower master,
till life in her, released, can murmur, " Brother,"
and youth to him returning answer " Sister."

He speaks again, but this time clearly : " Yes !
That was the dream, and the last pitiless
stroke of the dying day flashes and is over,
and the judge is judged, and there's no love for the
lover.
Oh, that's the true, the ancient pitiful curse
of Adam." " But not all die murderers,"
says Mrs. Jakes, " and it's easy to sit in a chair
and be sorry for mankind. But Jakes sits there,
and it's not mankind 'e's troubled for, not Jim,
but the days to come you've took away from him."
" I heard the bells to-night, above the fog,
proposing to the stars their decalogue
of merciful silver," says the judge, " as cold
as the high snows, and with their manifold
promise of peace. ' Let that one and this come,
for all that is human the *pax vobiscum.*'
But how shall we find peace ? Not by denying
the choices of life, nor standing still and crying,
' I dare not or I will not.' Each one takes
his own burden of action, and his own mistakes
walk with him like tall friends, and in the end,
believe me, madam, man has no other friend.
For the judge, as for the judged, there is no fresh
way ; but the God in them they clothe with the flesh
of what they do, and at the end of the road
who dares to judge when both are men, both God ! "
" That's no excuse," says she. " I'm not afraid
of the judgment of God. For when a woman's made
children, and felt the birth-pains take and shake her,
she knows no child need ever fear its Maker.

You talk of the choices of life ; if God 'ad sat
where you sit, 'E would still be wondering at
the pity of life, and surely 'E'd not dare
to 'and out death, unless 'E took 'Is share
of punishment. For when boys' blood is spilt, 'E
would say to 'Imself, ' I made 'em ; I am guilty.'
Nor 'E don't judge according as a man
is born and dressed and speaks and looks. 'E can
see wot they are—wot kids—both poor and rich,
and pities both, not caring w'ich is w'ich.
'E won't see Jakes as you did, wot you call
(I see it wrote) ' a 'ardened criminal,'
nor yet a common chap who, when you seen 'im,
your mind, unconscious, settled down agin him.
'E doesn't think in names, nor 'E don't start
with clarse or no clarse written in 'Is 'art.
'Ere's a poor kid got lost. ' Ah, well,' says 'E,
' kids will be kids. Another job for Me ! '
That's 'ow it seems to me. It isn't sense
to think 'E'd make so great a difference
between two men, like wot you are and Jakes,
that one sits crouching, while the other breaks
'is life to pieces in 'is 'and, as though
death were a thing 'e'd never 'ave to know."
" What would you have me do ? " the judge says.
Old
he looks to her, and small and white and cold.
A chair creaks and is still. The fog drifts thicker ;
the fire sinks to ash with a final flicker.
And thus for a moment each the other sees
stripped of their bodies' temporalities,
not he a judge, not she a broken woman,
but each the human crying to the human.
" Man that is born of woman is only this :
a shadow and a cry between two mysteries

in the darkness of his heart, whose movement saith
' Life ' on the upstroke, on the downstroke ' Death.'
And between the two dark strokes he suffers wrongs,
hates, loves, is loved and hated. And there are songs
go about him in the air, and he does not know
who sings and why it is sung, and whither they go.
But he is an echo of the song, the shadow, the cry
that dies in the dark, and the great song passes by."
" What would you have me do ? " the judge says
slowly.
" Nothing ! It's not your fault ! " she says. The holy
quiet grows deeper. " Thieves on either side
hang where the soul of man is crucified,"
he answers. " And the first is ignorance,
who will not take the last immortal chance
of waking in the kingdom of truth. The second
is knowledge, that stole the beam of light that
beckoned
when dawn was on the hills. But he at least
looks with his dying eyes upon the East,
and death comes in the moment of belief.
I was the first. I am the second thief.
What can I do ? " " Remember—when he's hanged,"
she cries. In the night outside the door is banged.

6

THE FIDDLER

Far off
in the cold mountains the immaculate snow
is lit by stars as cold. The terraced trees
move not, but hoard their perfume all the night,
till, with the dawn released, green flautists, they
stir all the air of the valley to a tune.
The cowherd climbing to the Alpine hut
stands for an instant with that green counter-
point
entranced. Then, as the cowbells overtake
the high ecstatic trebles of the snow,
he takes his alpenstock and trudges on.

BOOK V

RETORT BY MRS. JAKES
(MORTE SMITH)

Argument

Mrs. Jakes—the mother of the murderer—acts as housekeeper-general to Stephen Jinks, the poet. It is his habit to call all his housekeepers in turn Mrs. Smith, and it is therefore under that name that the old woman dies of heart-failure in the basement while Jinks is tramping Surrey. On the poet's return that night, though unaware of the woman's death, he writes the poem that may well be her epitaph.

BOOK V

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When you and I of the body are free,
whether in ash or bone,
we, who have been, shall not be
any longer alone.

Oh, not the easy hope of finding
again what youth once found,
nor of some bright physician binding
life's incurable wound.

And not the legend of lovers' meeting,
nor the mother with the son,
nor of the heart divinely beating
when the heart's beat is done.

Nor yet acceptance of the common
movement of all the earth,
sharing in death some pale, inhuman,
and universal birth.

Not that, nor those, but to become
unshakably assigned
to the innumerable dumb
armies of the mind,

with Alexander and with a slave,
as with a flower withered
in the long fiction of the grave
to be upgathered.

To be recorded in the endless
chronicle whose theme
is how eve brings to all these friendless
the friendship of the dream,

content to pay as score to Fate
the little price of breath
for presentation to the state
and dignity of death.

I

THE POET AT BREAKFAST

(" Good Lord ! It's Mrs. Smith," [1] he said—the name
he used for all the chars in turn who came
to cook his breakfast, dust, and bivouac
belowstairs with the cat.)

Mrs. Smith stood in the doorway with the tray
of piled-up breakfast dishes—teapot, jug,
marmalade, egg-stained plate. She turned away,
giving her shoulders her accustomed shrug.

It worried him that morning. " Mrs. Smith !
Is it the work ? or life ? or what ? your
shoulder——"
he muttered sulkily. " You started with
dreams like the rest." He saw the old eyes smoulder

and die to ash. " What's that to you ? " they
grumbled,
after the hot defiance. " You and your verses !
Leave life to them as lives it." Then she stumbled
out of the room. He heard what seemed like curses.

" Damn her ! " he said, suddenly jumping up.
" What harm in asking ? If the creature's human,
why can't she answer me ? " He heard a cup
smash on the stairs. " Good Lord," he said,
" poor woman ! "

[1] See p. 217

II

MRS. SMITH IN THE KITCHEN

Mrs. Smith threw the dishes in the sink,
turned on the tepid tap, and then stood fast
looking at her broken finger-nails. " You'd think
he'd leave a woman alone," she said at last.

" Dreams ! " And she stirred the greasy water
round,
and watched the crumbs float off, the broken shell
stick in the vent with a dull sucking sound.
" Dreams ! " And the milkboy rang the area bell.

She staggered up the step and took her quart.
The boy, as usual, stood poised and bristling
to snap, if she observed the milk was short.
She never spoke. The milkboy went off whistling.

She put the milk down in the table litter
of bits of meat, stray papers, a broken knife,
and saw it all with slow, unwinking, bitter
eyes, and went to her dishes gasping " Life."

III

THE POET GOES OUT TO SEEK COMPANIONSHIP

The poet wrote a dozen lines with scratches
and evident discomfort. Something ailed him.
He took his pipe out, hunted for the matches,
and wondered why his inspiration failed him.

" It's Mrs. Smith," he thought, and saw her standing
nebulously at the door with a slow movement
of her old mouth. The cup crashed on the landing
again. " Is that," he thought, " what life and love meant ?

Then what's the matter with death." He took his hat
irresolutely ; thought he'd call on someone :
paused at the top of the kitchen stairs. The cat
slipped past. He called. No answer from the dumb one.

" Shall I go down ? Oh, rot ! I'm going out.
I won't be in for dinner," he called, and clattered
the rickety door. Inside, his nervous shout
echoed and died. The lean cat slyly pattered.

IV

THE POET CONVERSES WITH FRIENDS

Evening at the Café Royal. " Vermouth, waiter !
I've been out in the country walking. Surrey
needs a good earthquake. Well ! I'll see you later ! "
" No, stay and dine." " I can't. I'm in a hurry."

" What was the good of talking to those chaps ?
Art ! What the hell was Art ? And all the chatter
of poets ? What did it come to—broken scraps.
Yesterday's dirty dishes." " What's the matter,

Stephen ? " " Why did they bother him, these
fellows ? "
He saw blurred faces, a large hat in the mirror,
looked at the ceiling's blatant gold and yellows—
heard a cup smash and started up in terror.

Two painters, clicking dominoes, looked up
as he swept past. " Sit down and join us, Jinks ! "
He muttered something vague about a cup,
and rushed into the night, away from drinks !

" I won't go home," he thought. " The theatre ! "
and found himself stuck somewhere in the pit.
" Not a bad play." He tried to bury her,
and walk home thinking of the plot of it.

V

THE MOON AND MRS. SMITH

Pausing in her cool affairs,
through the basement window stares
moon, and with cold witcheries
makes a drypoint out of mess. . . .
Dishes in her silver pool
almost glimmer beautiful ;
meat, torn papers, broken knife,
glitter with a secret life ;
even the taps that splash and sprawl
become a lunar waterfall.
Last her pencils touch the chair
with a sly and dexterous air.
Face, clasped hands, and unshrugged
shoulder
placid silver. Moon grows bolder,
inscribes her tranquil etching with,
" Life and death of Mrs. Smith."

VI

THE POET COMES HOME AT NIGHT

The poet didn't like the empty street,
nor the quiet house, whose blank and open eye
watched him amused. He entered on muffled
feet,
with head averted, not knowing nor asking why.

He sat down at his table. Verses came
effortless. All night long he wrote. And she
sat quiet all night long. When morning came
he went to bed and slept contentedly.

VII

MRS. SMITH'S EPITAPH

This is the poem he wrote. He tried to show it
to the coroner when challenged at the inquest.
" Witness said he was writing, being a poet."
" Laughter in court," but " instantly suppressed."

> " In that dark house at the road-end
> lives the old fiddler. Some folks say
> he's ninety past. Others pretend
> he's older. I don't know. I've heard him
> play."

I ask no more. The jasmine-lovely twilight
settled to dark. The moon's grace entered in
like a tall girl, and softly in the shy light
'twixt eve and night he touched his violin :

> " The moon was in it first :
> The shepherd, he played
> Endymion, whose thirst
> with that cold star was stayed.
> ' Youth, youth,' the sobbing string
> called, and love that is still

with the moon chambering
in the night on her hill. . . .
Softly ; and louder then
he played on colder string
how, though they lose love, men
forgive the heartbreaking :
how they say it is over
and her beauty is passed,
but love is a lover
we love to the last. . . .
Then, on a rising chord,
failure he played, and ending,
when the dream adored
is broken and there's no mending,
save in courage that is
more than the dream, and stays
when all her witcheries
have gone their golden ways ;
Courage he played to face
hope changing from little to less,
and age and the heart's disgrace
in her own ugliness ;
Courage, when nothing is there
but the long, empty road,
and the grey traveller
with naught in life but his load ;
Courage to the road-end and after
he played, and the last breath
crying 'twixt a sob and laughter,
Death ? What is death ?
The moon was in it last,
and wings that brush
the soul in the dark, and go past
with a single beat in the hush."

These things the poet wrote, and ended with the sigh of his poem that merges in a laugh. But, where she slept, it may be Mrs. Smith was well contented with her epitaph.

BELLS IN THE STRAND

All that has mercy,
  all that pities,
share in the heavenly
  Nunc dimittis.

For all that has failed,
  that cried " *De profundis,*"
" balm," chaunt the bells,
  " in the heart where the wound is."

The saint with the sinner—
  let that one and this come—
for all that is human
  the *pax vobiscum* :

The *pax vobiscum*, the
  floral peace
of lemon-blossom
  and orange-trees.

For the sinner who turns
  from his sin, no less
for the saint who renounces
  saintliness ;

for all that confesses,
" It has not sufficed,"
The absolution of
Jesus Christ.

CODA

Argument

Mr. Justice Crayfish has traversed the whole Uncelestial City from youth to old age. He is back at the gate from which he turned with the fiddler. And he sees the Celestial City on the hill.

CODA

Creator of the spirit, self-created,
since all creation is only thought ungodded
by gradual matter, slowly separated
from beauty that is for ever disembodied,

be near us when we build our city, indulge
the builders' plan with starshine, turn the brick
with the courses of dawn, and let the sun divulge
the secret of his gold arithmetic—

one among many. Be near us when we stumble
through myriad shapes, wherewith, when thou art dim, age
muffles the streets of vision, and, when these crumble,
let us remember of what they were the image.

Be near us when we fail, and, helpless, gaze on
the turrets, and tall cathedrals, that we planned
to be the music of life in diapason,
unravelling through silence, strand by strand.

When in the east the dawns we pass from wait red
and angry, till our own creations fear us,
when love, that was the builder, turns to hatred
of those for whom he builded, then be near us.

Be near us when the uncelestial city
in stone and marble coldly stands apart
against the sky, with room for all save pity,
possessing everything except its heart.

Creator of the spirit, when a king
sent out the last crusade, he built for this
a city in the marshes, encompassing
his dream with wall and tower and fortalice.

A year he wrought it, and every stone he laid
was quarried in your westering islands, set
with mortar to catch the east in ambuscade,
and what he built with vision is lovely yet.

But for his fleet the ecstasy, turned traitor,
faded, and only the cry remains of them
across the evening sea, "*Veni, Creator!*"—
only the cry and lost Jerusalem.

Be near us when we build like him, and when
the stone remains, but all the dream we built for
shivers and cools, and the lost souls of men,
dying, forget all that those souls were spilt for.

Send the crusaders, spirit, through sunset drawn
along the western seamarks of thy will.
Be near us always, but most of all when dawn
breaks, and we see thy City on the hill.

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